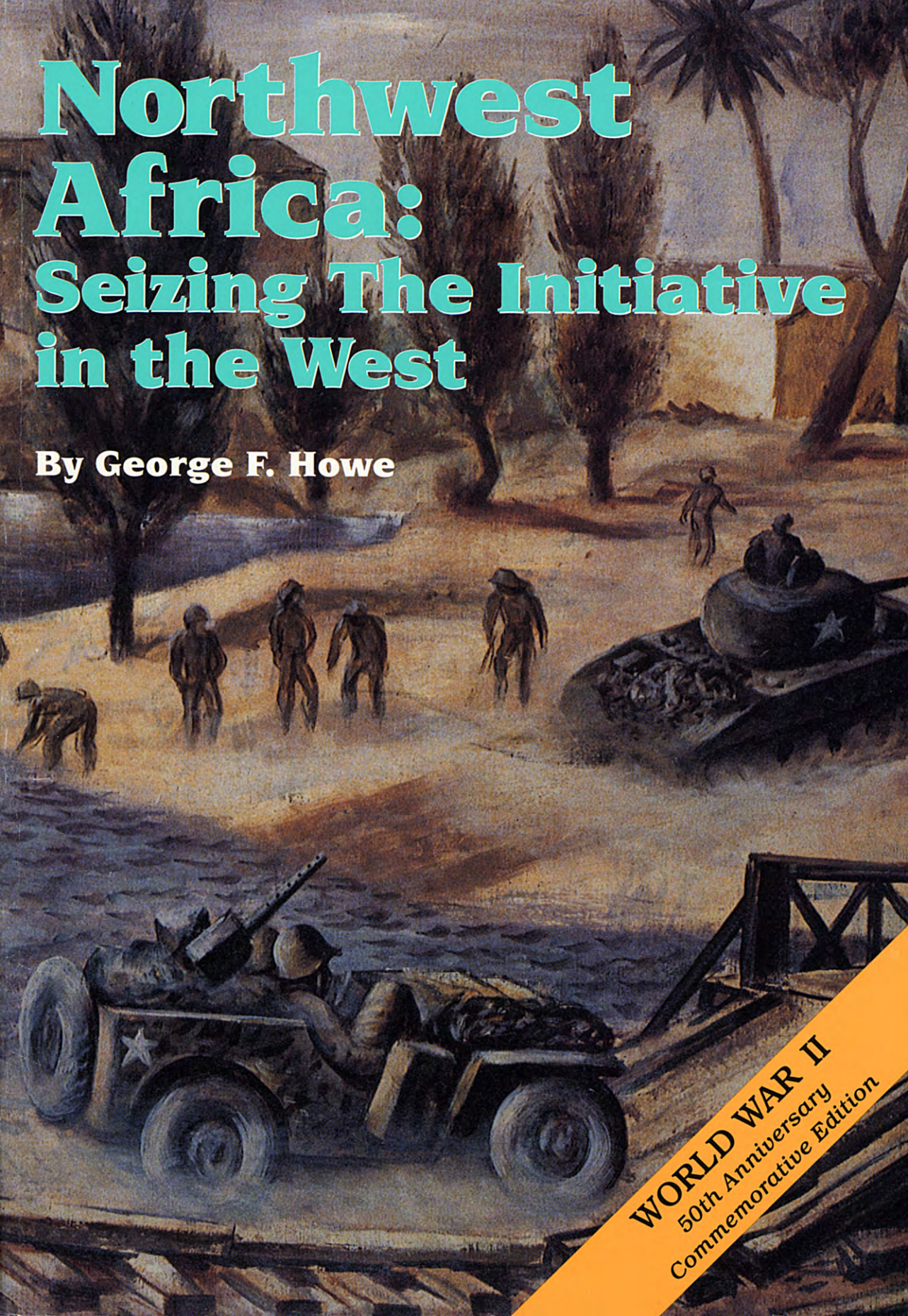
Northwest Africa: Seizing The Initiative in the West

By George F. Howe



WORLD WAR II
50th Anniversary
Commemorative Edition

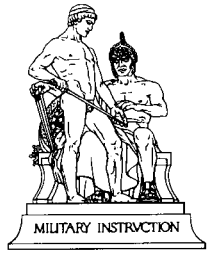
UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II

The Mediterranean Theater of Operations

NORTHWEST AFRICA: SEIZING THE INITIATIVE IN THE WEST

by

George F. Howe



CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY

UNITED STATES ARMY

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. . . to Those Who Served

Foreword

The history of initial actions in a war contains lessons of special value for the professional soldier and for all students of military problems. *Northwest Africa* abounds in such lessons, for it covers the first massive commitments of American forces in World War II. The continent of Africa became a gigantic testing ground of tactics, weapons, and training evolved through years of peace.

The invasion stretched American resources to the limit. Simultaneously the country was trying to maintain a line of communications to Australia, to conduct a campaign at Guadalcanal, to support China in the war against Japan, to arm and supply Russia's hard-pressed armies on the Eastern Front, to overcome the U-boat menace in the Atlantic, to fulfill lend-lease commitments, and to accumulate the means to penetrate the heart of the German and Japanese homelands. The Anglo-American allies could carry out the occupation of Northwest Africa only by making sacrifices all along the line.

Two campaigns occurred there: Operation TORCH which swiftly liberated French North Africa from Vichy French control, followed by a longer Allied effort to destroy all the military forces of the Axis powers in Africa. The latter concentrated in Tunisia, where the front at one time extended more than 375 miles, and fighting progressed from scattered meeting engagements to the final concentric thrust of American, British, and French ground and air forces against two German and Italian armies massed in the vicinity of Bizerte and Tunis.

The planning, preparation, and conduct of the Allied operations in Northwest Africa tested and strengthened the Anglo-American alliance. Under General Dwight D. Eisenhower a novel form of command evolved which proved superior to adversities and capable of overwhelming the enemy.

RICHARD W. STEPHENS
Maj. Gen., U.S.A.
Chief of Military History

Washington, D. C.
19 December 1956

The Author

The author, a graduate of the University of Vermont, received the Ph. D. degree in History from Harvard University in 1930. He was a member of the faculty of the University of Cincinnati from 1926 to 1945. In 1932–33 he studied and traveled in England, France, and the Mediterranean area as a Fellow of the Social Science Research Council.

In 1945 he became a staff member of the Historical Branch, G–2, War Department. Until 1952 he was writing the present volume as a member of the Mediterranean Theater Section, Office of the Chief of Military History. He then became Defense Historian, Department of the Interior. He is now Historian with the Department of Defense. Dr. Howe is the author of a biography of Chester Alan Arthur, of a *General History of the United States Since 1865,* and of *The Battle History of the First Armored Division.*

Preface

Certain considerations which attracted the author to the subject of this volume also governed its original plan. Campaigning in Northwest Africa was, for the U.S. Army, a school of coalition warfare and a graduate school of Axis tactics. Operation TORCH, with its political overtones, was the first great expeditionary assault in the West and by far the largest in history at that time. The historical evidence, even if oppressively bulky, was rich in variety. Captured documents and German officers provided the means of recovering "the enemy side," at least sufficiently to clarify most tactical situations of any consequence. Other materials made it possible to construct a history of the operations by the U.S. Army in context, that is, with due regard for the activities of the other Military Services and of the British and French allies.

During the five years from 1947 to 1952, significant changes in concept caused the original plan to be modified. It became apparent that, if full use were made of Axis materials coming to the Office of the Chief of Military History, the functioning of the Axis at all levels of command as a military coalition could be portrayed more effectively in this setting than in any likely alternative. The plan was therefore adjusted to make this narrative a history of two opposing coalitions by tracing the parallel strategic and tactical decisions from the heads of governments along the chains of command to execution in combat zones. During this process it was kept in mind that interest in the record of the *U.S. Army* must not be submerged by all that is implied in the phrase, *in World War II.*

That *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West* is a product of co-operation, collaboration, and co-ordination is apparent from the notes. Co-operation took the form chiefly of making records available and of providing authentic recollections which illuminated the documents. Critics of a first draft in 1951 gave the author invaluable guide lines for a second stage of preparation. It then received the principal attention of collaborators—editing, cartography, pictorial illustration, and further application of evidence on the enemy side. These processes terminated in the latter part of 1956.

The author would enjoy acknowledging by name his sense of debt to the many persons who co-operated, collaborated, and even co-ordinated in such a way as to make this book better than he alone could have made it. Among the co-operators, Forrest Pogue, Marcel Vigneras, Alice Miller, and Clyde Hillyer

Christian were particularly helpful, and assistance came in two instances which call for special mention. The author cherishes the recollection of sitting at the desk and in the chair of the President of Columbia University for many hours examining the manuscript diary of the Commander-in-Chief, Allied Force, a privilege which he owed to General Eisenhower and Kevin McCann. He holds in the greatest respect the scrupulous effort of Maj. Gen. Orlando Ward, while he was Chief of Military History, to avoid influencing in any way the book's description of General Ward's part in the events in Northwest Africa.

Among the collaborators, the author's indebtedness is greatest to the Chief Historian of the Army, Kent Roberts Greenfield; his contribution was far above and beyond the call of anything but his own broad concept of duty. The book benefited from the help of colleagues of the Mediterranean Theater Section of the Army's Office of Military History, Howard McGaw Smyth and Sidney T. Mathews, of Mrs. Jeanne Smith Cahill as research assistant, and David Jaffé as principal editor. During research, special aid came from (then) Maj. John C. Hatlem, USAF, an incomparable photographer of battle terrain, and Wsevolod Aglaimoff, the most analytical and discerning of cartographers. Subsequently, the book has prospered from the attentions of Maj. James F. Holly, cartographer, and Margaret Tackley, Chief of the Photographic Branch.

Two other collaborators invite the author's special acknowledgment, Detmar Finke and Charles von Luttichau. Their work in establishing full and precise detail, particularly with reference to the enemy side, was performed with a cheerful thoroughness which could hardly be exaggerated.

Certain persons who have lived vicariously with the fluctuations of this prolonged project with extraordinary forbearance are also hereby thanked.

Washington, D. C.
8 November 1956

GEORGE F. HOWE

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PART ONE

PREPARATIONS

CHAPTER I

The Mediterranean Theater of War, 1940–1942

American soldiers began striding through the surf to the beaches of Northwest Africa before dawn on 8 November 1942. They were the first of more than one million Americans to see service in the Mediterranean area during World War II—men of the II Army Corps in Tunisia, the Seventh Army in Sicily, the Fifth Army in Italy from Salerno to the Alps, and an elaborate theater organization.[1] The stream of American military strength which was to pour into that part of the world during the next two and one half years would include the Twelfth, Ninth, and Fifteenth Air Forces; the U.S. Naval Forces, Northwest African Waters; the Eighth Fleet; and a considerable American contribution to Allied Force Headquarters.[2]

These first Americans to arrive in Northwest Africa were part of an Allied expeditionary force which linked ground, sea, and air units from both the United States and the British Commonwealth. They were participants in the first large-scale offensive in which the Allies engaged as partners in a common enterprise, an operation which transformed the Mediterranean from a British to an Allied theater of war. Occupying French North Africa was actually to be the first of a considerable series of undertakings adopted, planned, mounted, and executed under the authority of the Anglo-American Combined Chiefs of Staff.[3] Succeeding operations in the Mediterranean area proved far more extensive than intended. One undertaking was to lead to the next, each based upon reasons deemed compelling at the

[1] At the time of the attack, French North Africa was within the boundaries of the European Theater of Operations, U.S. Army. On 4 February 1943, a separate North African Theater of Operations, U.S. Army, was established. On 1 November 1944, this area (with modified boundaries) was renamed the Mediterranean Theater of Operations, U.S. Army.

[2] (1) Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol. II, *Europe: TORCH to POINTBLANK, August 1942 to December 1943* (Chicago, 1949). (2) Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol. II, *Operations in North African Waters, October 1942–June 1943* (Boston, 1950). (3) History of Allied Force Headquarters, August 1942–December 1942, Pt. I, pp. 3–4, 18, 23–26. DRB AGO.

[3] The Combined Chiefs of Staff was an agency created in response to decisions reached at the ARCADIA Conference of American and British leaders in Washington in January 1942. The agency's headquarters was in Washington, where the Joint Chiefs of Staff met with the British Joint Staff Mission (representatives of the British Chiefs of Staff Committee), but a large number of its sessions took place at special conferences attended by the Chiefs of Staff Committee. The Combined Chiefs of Staff acquired a structure of subordinate planners and a secretariat. (1) See WD, Press Release, 6 Feb 42, printed in New York *Times*, February 7, 1942. (2) See also Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941–1942*, UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II (Washington, 1953).

time, until at the end of hostilities Allied forces dominated the Mediterranean Sea and controlled most of its coastal region. After liberating French North Africa and clearing the enemy from the Italian colonies, the Allies sought to bring the entire French empire effectively into the war against the Axis powers. They reopened the Mediterranean route to the Middle East. They went on from Africa to liberate Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica. They caused Mussolini to topple from power, and they brought his successors to abject surrender. They drew more and more German military resources into a stubborn defense of the Italian peninsula, and helped the Yugoslavs to pin down within their spirited country thousands of Axis troops. Eventually, the Allies delivered a solid blow from southern France against the German forces which were opposing the Allied drive from the beaches of Normandy.[4] They made Marseilles available for Allied use and they occupied northern Italy and Greece. In Italy they forced the first unconditional surrender by a large German force in Europe. The events following the invasion of French North Africa thus made of the Mediterranean a major theater in World War II's titanic struggle. The momentous first step, though not timorous, was hesitant, and somewhat reluctant; like the first step of a child it was more a response to an urge for action than a decision to reach some specific destination. The responsibility for this beginning rested more with the civilian than with the professional military leaders of the two countries. Whether the decision was wise or not, the critical factors affecting success, like those inviting the attempt, were largely political rather than military.

The Mediterranean as an Axis Theater

Axis involvement in the Mediterranean theater of war likewise mounted from small beginnings and after periodic inventories of the general military situation. Since the German Fuehrer, Adolf Hitler, had precipitated the war much earlier than the Duce, Benito Mussolini, had agreed to be ready,[5] Italy remained a nonbelligerent until June 1940, and participated then very briefly in the attacks which led to French surrender. The Mediterranean escaped major hostilities during this period of Italian preparations. Italian forces were assembled in eastern Cyrenaica for an eventual attack on Egypt in conjunction with an attack from the south to be launched from Ethiopia, while British forces were gathered to defend Egypt. But actual conflict was deferred.

After France's capitulation in June 1940, and after the British Government refused to make peace by negotiation, Hitler reluctantly concluded that the war must be carried to British soil.[6] His project for invading

[4] *Report of Operations: The Seventh United States Army in France and Germany, 1944–1945,* (Heidelberg, 1946), Vol. I.

[5] Instrucs by Mussolini, 4 May 39, for the Italian Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano, to be used at the next meeting with Ribbentrop; Explanatory Note, 21 Aug 39, regarding Italian attitude. Both in Ciano Papers, Rose Garden Collection.

[6] MS #C–059a, Operation *SEA LION Das Unternehmen SEELOEWE un der verschaerfte Luftkrieg gegen England bis zum 30. Oktober 1940* (Helmuth Greiner). This manuscript is one of a series written after the war from the contemporary drafts which Greiner had made for the war diary of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, Wehrmachtfuehrungsstab,* that is, the *Armed Forces Operations Staff* of Hitler's *Armed Forces High Command* (hereafter referred to as *OKW/WFSt*). Greiner kept this diary from 1939 to 1943.

the United Kingdom was frustrated at an early stage by the failure of Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering's Luftwaffe to eliminate the Royal Air Force and by the irreconcilable discrepancies between what the German Army required and what the German Navy could furnish for transport and escort shipping. He repeatedly postponed a decision to attack across the English Channel and eventually abandoned the idea.[7] If he could not strike his enemy at home, he proposed instead to inflict a vital injury by seizing Gibraltar in co-operation with Spain and Italy and by supporting the Italians in their drive toward Egypt and the Suez Canal.[8] He tried, mainly in this connection, to construct an anti-British alliance of Germany, Italy, France, and Spain, thus gaining for the Axis the French fleet along with French and Spanish strategic areas. His efforts failed.

Marshal Henri Pétain engaged in an endless, elastic contest with the Nazis to hold fast to all things that were French. His government, ever under threat of military occupation of all of France at the Fuehrer's signal, served Hitler's purpose by preventing the creation in the French colonies of an independent anti-Nazi French government.[9] Whatever concessions beyond the armistice agreements Pétain might make at Nazi insistence and in return for the release of German-held French prisoners, for example, the old Marshal would never commit French forces to fight beside the Germans.[10] The French Navy, bitter as it was toward the British, would have scuttled its warships before allowing them to be used to advance Hitler's aspirations.[11] France, therefore, was not available for an alliance against the British and was left in control of its Northwest African colonies under pledge to defend them against attack from whatever side.[12]

Francisco Franco set such an exorbitant territorial price upon a partnership with Germany as to make impossible an alliance which included Spain and France, and he engaged in such elaborate and effective procrastination as to render any genuine military contribution to the seizure of Gibraltar a matter for Nazi despair. When Hitler went to meet the Caudillo at Hendaye, France, on 29 October 1940, the Spanish dictator subjected him to the unusual experience of being a listener for hours. Rather than undergo such pain again, Hitler told Mussolini he would prefer to have several teeth pulled.[13]

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] (1) Confs, 6 and 26 Sep 40, Office of Naval Intelligence, *Fuehrer Conferences on matters dealing with the German Navy* (hereafter cited as ONI, *Fuehrer Conference*), 1940, Vol. II. ONI, *Fuehrer Conferences,* is a selection of translated documents from German naval archives. (2) Hitler's Dirs, 12 Nov and 10 Dec 40, *WFSt/Abt L (I), Nr. 33356/40* and *OKW/WFSt/Abt L, Nr. 33400/40,* Office of Naval Intelligence, *Fuehrer and other Top-Level Directives of the German Armed Forces* (hereafter cited as ONI, *Fuehrer Directives*), 1939–1941. This is a selection of translated documents from German military and naval archives. (3) Hitler's Dir, 29 May 42, OKW/*WFSt/Op Nr. 55896/42,* ONI, *Fuehrer Directives,* 1942–1945.

[10] Msg, SS Col Dr Knochen to Reichsfuehrer SS, from Paris, 14 Nov 42, transmitting report of J. Fessati of conversations in Vichy w/Adm Platon. (Himmler Files, Footlocker 51, No. 10.)

[11] (1) William L. Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble* (New York, 1947) pp. 375, 390. (2) Albert Kammerer, *La Passion de la Flotte Française* (Paris, 1951), pp. 268–300, 310. (3) Winston S. Churchill, *Their Finest Hour* (Boston, 1949), pp. 217, 229, 231, 236.

[12] Ltr, Darlan to Churchill, 4 Dec 42, printed in transl in Churchill, *Their Finest Hour,* pp. 239–40.

[13] (1) MS # C–065h, *Das Unternehmen FELIX* (Greiner). Operation *FELIX* was the planned German attack on Gibraltar. (2) State Dept Press Release 150, 4 Mar 46. (3) Herbert Feis, *The*

The fact that a new alliance of the four governments could not be attained became evident at a time when even the existing arrangement between Germany and Italy was somewhat strained. Although the two dictators had a friendly personal relationship, the Italians intended to wage a separate and parallel war in the Mediterranean. Hitler had always accepted the principle that the Mediterranean was an area of paramount Italian interest just as, farther north, German interests were exclusive.[14] He received in the autumn of 1940 clear indication that the Italians wished to proceed independently. Initially the Italians refused a German offer of an armored unit for use in the planned Italian campaign from Libya against Egypt. It was only after the campaign, begun on 12 September under the command of Maresciallo d'Italia Rudolfo Graziani, had bogged down that the Italians reluctantly accepted the German offer. On 28 October, moreover, although knowing Hitler's opposition, and therefore dissembling their intentions, the Italians attacked Greece from Albania.[15] Hitler's disgust at the opening of this new front in the Balkans by the Italians led him to withdraw temporarily his offer of German armored support for the Italian forces in Libya. This decision was confirmed during the Innsbruck conference of 4 and 5 November between Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of the *Armed Forces High Command* (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*—OKW) and Maresciallo d' Italia Pietro Badoglio, the Chief of the *Supreme General Staff* (*Stato Maggiore Generale*). When both these adventures became engulfed in failure, the Italians on 19 December abandoned their reluctance to accept German reinforcements which Hitler, despite his irritation with Italian behavior, had again offered to supply for reasons of high military policy.[16]

Hitler was already planning a Blitzkrieg against Russia to be executed during the summer of 1941.[17] For that attack his Balkan flank had to be secure. He believed that the free use of the Mediterranean route by the British was equivalent to a large extra tonnage of transport shipping and the release of naval warships for other operations, an advantage to his major enemy which might make a complete Axis victory unattainable.[18] He also wished to prevent the detrimental effect upon Italian morale and the severe loss of prestige for the Axis which would result from the loss of Libya and the related possibility of a separate Italian peace.[19]

One large aviation unit (*X. Fliegerkorps*) received orders to shift to southern Italy in December 1940 and a small armored force began crossing from Naples to Tripoli in February. There it was to be combined with Italian mobile units under the command of Generalleutnant Erwin

Spanish Story (New York, 1949). (4) Ltr, Hitler to Mussolini, 31 Dec 40, sent after recovery to CG US Fifth Army by Col T. J. Wells, 15 Jul 45. Copy in transl in OCMH. (5) Hitler's Dir, 12 Nov 40, *WFSt/Abt L(I), Nr. 33356/40,* ONI, *Fuehrer Directives,* 1939–1941.

[14] Obersalzberg Conference, 13 Aug 39, German notes of the conference between Hitler and Ciano, Doc TC–77, in the records of the United States Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality, Record Group 238, National Archives (hereafter cited as USC, Rg 238).

[15] MS # C–065e, *Die Unterstuetzung Italiens im Herbst und Winter* 1940–41 (Greiner).

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] D/A Pamphlet 20–261a, *The German Campaign in Russia—Planning and Operations (1940–42)* (Washington, 1955).

[18] MS # C–065f, *Rommel's erster Feldzug in Afrika, 1941* (*Greiner*).

[19] (1) MS # C–065 (Greiner). (2) Conf, 8–9 Jan 41, ONI, *Fuehrer Conferences,* 1941, Vol. I.

Rommel in an aggressive rather than a static defense. Rommel was subordinated to the Italian Commander in Chief Libya (*Commandante del Comando Superiore Forze Armate Libia*), Generale d'Armata Italo Gariboldi, who replaced Graziani in early February 1941. Rommel's command, the *German Africa Corps* (*Deutsches Afrika Korps*), shortly reinforced by the addition of an armored division, received general directives from Hitler only after Mussolini had approved them, for the German forces were considered as agents of Italian military policy within the Axis partnership.[20]

The *German Africa Corps* prepared for its eastward thrust toward Egypt while other German troops extended their hold over the Balkans and prepared to subjugate Greece. Some of the limited British forces in northern Africa were diverted to Greece to aid its defenders, but not enough to prevent the Peloponnesus from being swiftly overrun in April 1941, while almost simultaneously Rommel's force swept across Libya with surprising speed to the Egyptian border. Only the port of Tobruk remained in British possession in the rear of the Axis units, where it was a continual threat to their long line of supply. The British Eighth Army, which was formed during the next few months of 1941, was not ready for another offensive to the westward before November, but Rommel also was obliged to pause. If these Axis thrusts in the Balkans and northern Africa were, on the one hand, followed by the dramatically successful airborne assault on Crete in May, they were, on the other hand, somewhat offset shortly afterward by the British and Gaullist-French seizure of Syria and by the British military occupation of Iraq. Turkey remained resolutely neutral.[21]

All Axis operations in 1941 were overshadowed by the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June. The requirements and preparations for this colossal effort precluded any extensive German commitments in the Mediterranean. Franco's delays dragged out negotiations over German seizure of Gibraltar beyond the time when anything could be done about it without detriment to the impending attack against Russia.[22] Throughout most of the year, therefore, the principal feature of the war in the Mediterranean was the battle over supply lines. German naval units were drawn into this struggle, like the ground troops, in a role at least nominally subordinate to the Italian *Supreme Command*.[23] German aviation harassed British shipping. German submarines joined Italian naval units in policing the waters of the Sicilian straits. The occupation of Crete, costly as it was, improved the Axis position greatly in

[20] Hitler's Order, 10 Dec 40, and Dir, 11 Jan 41 *OKW/WFSt/Abt L, Nr. 33400/40* and *OKW/WFSt/Abt L, Nr. 44018/41;* Orders signed by Keitel, 13 Jan and 3 Apr 41, *OKW/WFSt/Abt L, Nr. 00 94/41;* Order signed by Col Walter Warlimont, deputy chief of *OKW/WFSt,* 19 Feb 41, *OKW/WFSt/Abt L (I Op), Nr. 44189/41.* All in ONI, *Fuehrer Directives,* 1939–1941.

[21] (1) D/A Pamphlet 20-260, *The German Campaign in the Balkans (Spring 1941)* (Washington, 1953). (2) Winston S. Churchill, *The Grand Alliance* (Boston, 1950), pp. 95–110, 196–304, 321–32.

[22] MS # C-065h (Greiner).

[23] (1) The Italian *Supreme General Staff* was reorganized in June 1941. Its powers were greatly increased and it became the most important organ of command. Thereafter it was kown as the *Comando Supremo (Supreme Command).* See Howard McGaw Smyth, "The Command of the Italian Armed Forces in World War II," *Military Affairs,* XV, No. 1 (Spring, 1951), 38. (2) Hitler's Order, 29 Oct 41, *WFSt/Abt L (I Op), Nr. 441794/41,* in ONI, *Fuehrer Directives,* 1939–1941. (3) Vice-Adm. Eberhard Weichold (*German Admiral, Rome*), *The War at Sea in the Mediterranean.* U.S. Navy Press Release 26 Feb 47.

the violent effort to strangle the connection between Malta and the eastern Mediterranean. The British island of Malta, between the Sicilian straits and Crete, was a base for aircraft, destroyers, and submarines which severely curtailed the flow of supplies and reinforcements from Italy to Tripoli. The fortunes of Rommel's command seemed almost directly proportional to Axis success in neutralizing Malta.[24]

If the Soviet Union had succumbed to the gigantic attack which began in June 1941, Hitler would presumably have undertaken in November an elaborate attack upon the Near East and have forced Spain to allow an attack against Gibraltar. Concentric drives by Rommel through Egypt, by a second force from Bulgaria through Turkey, and, if necessary, by a third element from Transcaucasia through Iran were also contemplated.[25] Success in these operations would have broken the British hold on the Middle East. But when, despite the heightened German need for petroleum from the Middle East for operations in 1942, the attack against the Russians fell short of success, the program scheduled for November was necessarily delayed. The British began a counteroffensive in northern Africa at that point which relieved the garrison cut off in Tobruk and drove Rommel's forces back on El Agheila. This advantage was abruptly canceled in January 1942, when Rommel made a second advance to the east which regained much of the lost ground.[26] His command was renamed *Panzerarmee Afrika,* and received reinforcements and additional equipment to resume the attack against the British Eighth Army. From the El Gazala Line he was expected to gain Tobruk and the coast directly east of it.[27]

Rommel's success and the capture of Malta were interdependent, a fact which produced a decision to undertake seizure of the island. Heavy air attacks would be made upon it in April 1942 to cover the shipment to Tripoli, Bengasi, and Derna of the means required for the first phase of Rommel's offensive. After he had seized Tobruk and pushed to Marsa Matrūh, thus holding the area from which Malta might be helped by British land-based airplanes, he was to pause while mixed German and Italian forces, partly airborne and partly seaborne, gained possession of the island. Supplies to Rommel could thereafter go forward from Italy to the African ports in sufficient volume and his offensive would be resumed. While these plans were maturing, more German forces reached the Mediterranean basin.[28]

[24] Churchill, *The Grand Alliance,* pp. 62, 570–72, 575–77.

[25] Draft Dir, 11 Jun 41, *OKW/WFSt/Abt L (I Op), Nr. 44886/41,* in ONI, *Fuehrer Directives,* 1939–1941.

[26] (1) Erwin Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass* (Heidenheim/Brenz, 1950), pp. 94–99. (2) Winston S. Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate* (Boston, 1950), pp. 20–35. (3) MS # T–3–P1, *Mittelmeerkrieg* (Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring), Pt. I.

[27] A panzer group headquarters (*Panzergruppe Afrika*) was created for Rommel in August 1941 with command over the *German Africa Corps, Italian XXX Corps,* and some small miscellaneous units. Rommel was promoted to General der Panzertruppen 1 July 1941 and to Generaloberst on 1 February 1942. (1) OKW, *Kriegstagebuch* (hereafter cited as OKW, *KTB*), *1.IV.–31.VI.42,* Entries 21, 30 Apr, and 1, 7 May 42. Great Britain, Exhibit 227, USC, Rg 238. This document appears to be the only one of those comprising the text of the OKW war diary that was not destroyed. The OKW war diary, prepared by Hitler's Plenipotentiary for Military History, Oberst Walter Scherff, was to be the basis for a history of the war as seen from the highest German level. (2) Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass,* pp. 111–26. (3) MS # T–3–P1 (Kesselring), Pt. I.

[28] (1) Order signed by Keitel, 4 May 42, *WFSt/Abt Op Nr. 5579/42,* ONI, *Fuehrer Directives,* 1942–1945. The planned operation for Malta was Operation *HERKULES,* and the one for Libya was

The German *X. Fliegerkorps* was replaced, beginning late in 1941, by the *Second Air Force* (*Luftflotte 2*) over which Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring exercised command as Commander in Chief South (*Oberbefehlshaber Sued*) from a new headquarters at Frascati, near Rome. Kesselring, subordinated to the Duce, was expected to employ his aviation in conformity with directives issued or approved by Mussolini, and to have a relationship as air commander to the Italian Supreme Command similar to that of Rommel as ground commander to the Italian Commander in Chief in Libya. Kesselring as senior German officer also assisted Generalleutnant Enno von Rintelen, Commanding General, *Headquarters, German General at the Headquarters of the Italian Armed Forces* (*Deutscher General bei dem Hauptquartier der italienischen Wehrmacht—German General, Rome*) in conveying German views to the Italians. If the action of the Italian Supreme Command was influenced by a spirit of deference to German military enlightenment, the Italians nonetheless insisted that the Germans at all times adhere strictly to the form of Italian control, and Hitler supported this arrangement.[29]

Axis operations in 1942 began with marked successes and brought the coalition to the zenith of its fortunes in World War II. Rommel's late May attack went much more rapidly than had been expected and succeeded in taking Tobruk in June almost immediately instead of being delayed by the kind of stubborn defense which had kept that port from the Germans in early 1941. British losses of men and matériel were great, but the loss of Tobruk's port was equally serious.[30] Rommel believed he could continue to Cairo before meeting effective resistance. At that juncture, Hitler was lured into a serious blunder. He had been unable to quiet his misgivings over the projected seizure of Malta, for he felt that the assault was inadequately planned and subsequent support perilously undependable. He therefore proposed to Mussolini that Operation *HERKULES,* the seizure of Malta, be postponed in favor of a continued drive into Egypt, and Mussolini, despite the demurrer of some of his military advisers, consented.[31] A new line of supply to Rommel was to run via Crete to Tobruk. Malta was allowed to recover. In July 1942, Rommel's army got as far inside Egypt as the El 'Alamein position, some sixty miles southwest of Alexandria, before being held up by lack of supplies and the opposition of the British Eighth Army.[32] On the Eastern Front, the German

Operation *THESEUS*. (2) Ugo Conte Cavallero, *Comando Supremo, Diario 1940–43 de Capo di S. M. G.* (Rome, 1949), p. 251 (30 Apr 42). (3) MS # T–3–P1 (Kesselring), Pt. I.

[29] The term Commander in Chief South will be used in this volume to refer to the person holding the title *Oberbefehlshaber Sued,* while the abbreviated form *OB SOUTH* will refer to his headquarters.

Second Air Force consisted of *II. Fliegerkorps* at Messina and *X. Fliegerkorps* at Athens. (1) Order signed by Keitel, 29 Oct 41, *WFSt/Abt L (I Op), Nr. 441794/41,* ONI, *Fuehrer Directives,* 1939–1941. (2) MS # T–3–P1 (Kesselring), Pt. I. (3) AAF Air Hist Gp Rpts 578–79, German Air Force in the Mediterranean. AAF Archives 512–430 C (9961-4).

[30] Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate,* pp. 413–20.

[31] (1) OKW, *KTB,* v. *I.IV–31.VI.42,* 20 and 21 May, 22, 23, and 24 Jun 42. (2) Hitler's Ltr, 23 Jun 42, in transl is quoted in Cavallero, *Comando Supremo,* p. 277, and a comdrs' conf in the field, 25 Jun 42, is recorded on pp. 278–81. (3) MS # T–3–P1 (Kesselring), Pt. I, also describes comdrs' conf of 25 Jun 42.

[32] (1) As soon as Rommel's army crossed the Libyan-Egyptian border the command of this force was switched from the Italian Commander in Chief Libya, to the *Comando Supremo.* Rommel was promoted to Generalfeldmarschall on 22 June 1942.

attacks on the southern sector pressed speedily toward the Don River, heading beyond it toward Stalingrad and the Caucasus.[33] Such was the situation in the Mediterranean when the Allies faced the question where to attack in 1942.

The Allied Decision To Occupy French North Africa

The Allies were drawn to the Mediterranean by the fact that the British Eighth Army was arrayed against *Panzer Army Africa* near Egypt and by the military potentialities of the French colonies in northwestern Africa either as friend or foe. These potentialities had been considered well before the United States became a belligerent. American military planners studied the requirements of operations designed to prevent enemy use of air or naval bases on the Atlantic African coast as far south as Dakar.[34] At the end of 1940, when the British had defeated Graziani's army, they held six divisions in readiness to join the French in defending Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia in case Pétain agreed to resume the war against the Axis. After that opportunity failed to materialize, the British planned in October 1941, in case of a success against Rommel in Cyrenaica, to capture Tripoli and, subsequently, to support French North Africa in a renewal of hostilities. Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill brought to the ARCADIA Conference in Washington in December, shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, his own strategic analysis for 1942 and 1943 containing strong arguments for giving the liberation of French North Africa the highest priority in the Atlantic area. President Franklin D. Roosevelt showed marked interest in the project.[35]

The guiding principle of Allied strategy in 1942 in the Atlantic and European areas was to close and tighten the ring around Germany, while achieving readiness for an invasion to destroy her military power. Anglo-American leaders hoped that by 1943 the way would be clear for an Allied return to the Continent, either across the Mediterranean, or via the Aegean and the Balkans, or by landings in western Europe.[36] A friendly occupation in 1942 of French North Africa was recognized to be "of the first strategical importance in the Atlantic area," and plans to achieve this were in preparation for several weeks following the conference.[37]

Influences attracting the Allies toward the Mediterranean, strong as they were in January 1942, were for a time counterbalanced by other factors of greater strength.[38] The competing claims upon Allied resources were numerous and very powerful. The line of communications through the Hawaiian Islands to Australia

MS # T-3, *Der Feldzug in Nordafrika 1941–43* (General der Panzertruppen Walther Nehring, *et al.*), Pt. II, Ch. VI. (2) Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass,* pp. 179–88.

[33] Edgar McInnis, *The War: Third Year* (Toronto, 1942), pp. 261–71.

[34] Joint Plan [BLACK] for the Occupation of Dakar, 10 Aug 41. (See draft papers in BLACK and BARRISTER Development File, G–3 Regd Docs.)

[35] (1) Churchill's memo, dated 16 December 1942, and the President's first response as reported by the Prime Minister to the British War Cabinet and Chiefs of Staff on 23 December 1942, are printed in Churchill, *The Grand Alliance,* pp. 646–51, 664–65. (2) Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York, 1948), pp. 460–66.

[36] Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins,* p. 459.

[37] Memo ABC 4/6, JCS and COS for President and Prime Minister, 13 Jan 42, sub: Mvmts and projects in Atlantic Theater—first half 1942. OPD Exec 8. (2) Directive for creation of Task Force GYMNAST was approved in the Office of the Chief of Staff, Army, on 19 February 1942.

[38] Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare,* analyzes these factors.

had to be maintained, and in the face of continued Japanese successes in their drive southward, various points along the line had to be reinforced. China could not be abandoned while it absorbed so large a number of Japanese troops and persevered in the war which it had waged since 1931. Russia was engaging by far the largest proportion of the German strength for the second year, and required the shipment of munitions over long and expensive routes. Iceland and the British Isles were to receive American garrison forces in order to release British units for service elsewhere. The Battle of the Atlantic ran in favor of the German U-boats, which achieved appalling successes close to the eastern coast of the United States.[39] The Americas had to be defended. A large portion of the munitions and men prepared for combat in the United States had to be devoted to the expansion program of all the armed services. Lack of shipping precluded any operation in French North Africa until still more pressing demands elsewhere were met.

Before the shipping situation eased, the Allies in April revised the program outlined at the ARCADIA Conference, adopting as the new major objective the concentration of forces in the British Isles for a cross-Channel attack in 1943 against the heart of Germany through France and the Low Countries. Frequent Commando raids against the French coast would be made during the period of preparations; the heavy bombers of the U. S. Eighth Air Force being organized in the United Kingdom were to supplement those of the Royal Air Force in striking German industrial targets with increasing severity; but the main effort of the American forces in the Atlantic area in 1942 would be to transfer units and matériel from the United States to the United Kingdom, there to complete training for the ultimate assault during the following year.[40] Measured by the reasoning underlying these plans, an expedition to French North Africa would be a diversionary undertaking, inevitably weakening the projected main effort.

Militating against the program of concentration which the Allies adopted in April were several strong influences. The main attack in 1943 could not succeed unless the Soviet Union were still engaging on the Eastern Front much of the German strength. The ability and the determination of the Russians to maintain resistance to the Axis forces might not survive the German offensive of 1942. A preliminary attack across the English Channel in 1942 [41] to gain a continental bridgehead for subsequent expansion in 1943 was contemplated by the Allies as a means of aiding the Russians without forfeiting the ability to make the main attack on schedule. If the Germans should fall suddenly into internal political convulsion, the same plan could be used to grasp that advantageous opportunity. But the measure of relief for the hard-pressed Russians would be determined by the size of the German forces diverted to western France from the Eastern Front to oppose the

[39] Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, I, *The Battle of the Atlantic* (Boston, 1950), 125–57.

[40] (1) This build-up for a cross-Channel attack was known as Operation BOLERO. (2) Adoption of the new plans leading to the main assault, Operation ROUNDUP, is described in Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, pp. 518–34. (3) See also Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Welfare;* Gordon A. Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack,* UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II (Washington, 1951). (4) Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate,* pp. 314–24, prints pertinent documents. (5) Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York, 1948), pp. 418ff., citing Stimson's diary.

[41] Operation SLEDGEHAMMER.

Anglo-American landings, so that genuine assistance to Russia was tantamount to inviting defeat. The forces available would be preponderantly British. The British were unwilling to make a sacrifice attack for such a purpose. In view of the President's encouragement to Molotov in May 1942 to expect a "second front" before too long,[42] some Anglo-American offensive in 1942 seemed imperative in order to sustain Russian faith in the western Allies. The President was determined that American units go into combat against the Germans before the end of the year, presumably for the effect such a situation would have on American morale.[43] The Prime Minister was ready for an Anglo-American operation in Norway in conjunction with the Russians, and eager for an invasion of northwestern Africa, but on 8 July notified the President that the British saw no possibility of making a preliminary attack in 1942 to gain a beachhead across the Channel.[44]

The British decision against Operation SLEDGEHAMMER was based not only on the undue risk of defeat in such an undertaking, but also on doubt whether there were enough resources, particularly the craft and crews required for the amphibious phase of the attack.[45] It may also have found some support in the Prime Minister's determination, as he has written in his memoirs,[46] to bring about an Allied occupation of French North Africa and perhaps of Norway.

After the British refusal to proceed with Operation SLEDGEHAMMER was received, the Joint Chiefs of Staff contemplated adherence to the principle of concentration of force against a major adversary by switching the main American effort to that in the Pacific against Japan.[47]

The President rejected this proposal, particularly because no large-scale beginnings could be made there before 1943, but also because of his conviction that Allied strategy was sound and should not be abandoned.[48] He did, however, make a final effort to reconcile the British authorities to the course of action urged upon him by his own military advisers. On 18 July he sent Mr. Harry Hopkins, George C. Marshall, and Admiral Ernest J. King to London with instructions to make certain that every means would be considered for a small-scale attack on the Continent in 1942. If convinced that such an operation could not be mounted with any reasonable chance of "diverting German air forces from the annihilation of Russia," they were to proceed with the consideration of other projects involving combat with German ground forces in 1942, either in North Africa or the Middle East. It was understood that preparations for ROUNDUP (a

[42] Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, p. 563, prints a contemporary record of the Molotov-Roosevelt conversations of 30 May 1942 with the communiqué issued 11 June after Molotov's return to the Soviet Union.

[43] His instructions to Hopkins, Marshall, and King, dated 16 July 42, said: "It is of the highest importance that U.S. ground troops be brought into action against the enemy in 1942." Par 3 (e), printed in Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, p. 603. (2) See also Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, pp. 425–26.

[44] Msg printed in Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate*, pp. 434–35.

[45] (1) Landing craft reaching the United Kingdom in September were but 10 percent of what in April had been deemed necessary for Operation SLEDGEHAMMER. JCS, Special Monograph on Amphibious Warfare, Ch. II, pp. 60–72. (2) Mark W. Clark, *Calculated Risk* (New York, 1950), p. 34.

[46] Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate*, p. 441.

[47] Memo, Marshall and King for President, 10 Jul 42. OPD 381 Gen, Case 73.

[48] Memo, Col John R. Deane, for King, 12 Jul 42, quoting msg from President to Marshall and King phoned from Hyde Park, N. Y.; Memo, Marshall and King for President, 12 Jul 42. Copies in OPD 381 Gen. Case 73.

full-scale continental attack) in 1943 were to continue without interruption.[49]

The President Commits the United States to Operation TORCH

The Allied military chiefs in London failed to reconcile their disagreement over the feasibility of SLEDGEHAMMER in 1942, a fact which was then reported to the President.[50]

The operation could not be undertaken without agreement and was therefore abandoned,[51] except that, mainly for appearance's sake, planning operations and some preparations were continued.

The Combined Chiefs of Staff had been unable to agree and had divided along national lines. Here then was a critical test of the Anglo-American capacity to function as a military coalition. Mr. Churchill and Mr. Roosevelt broke the deadlock. The President, as Mr. Churchill had discovered, was more favorably inclined toward an operation in Northwest Africa than his military advisers, especially General Marshall. The President on 23 July sent supplementary instructions to the American members of the Combined Chiefs directing them to arrive at an agreement on some operation to be launched in 1942, and listing possibilities among which the occupation of French North Africa was given the top priority.[52] Bound by these instructions, the American chiefs agreed that using American forces in Northwest Africa was preferable to sending them to the Middle East. Thereupon, on 25 July, the Combined Chiefs reached a compromise. The U. S. members agreed to accept Operation TORCH on condition that a final decision by the Combined Chiefs be postponed.[53]

According to this agreement, planning would start at once in London, but final decision to mount the invasion would be reserved until 15 September. If it then appeared likely that the Russians could actively resist German military power in the spring of 1943, the ROUNDUP operation would retain its priority over any other undertaking. If the Russians, on 15 September, seemed about to collapse, the invasion of North Africa would be mounted in time for landings before 1 December.[54] Some of the heavy bomber groups and other air units previously destined for action in 1942–1943 over Europe would be shifted to North

[49] (1) Memo, Marshall for WD Msg Ctr, 16 Jul 42, sub: Opns this year to be sent to Gen Eisenhower only. OPD Exec 5. (2) Memo, President for Hopkins, Marshall, and King, 16 Jul 42, sub: Instrucs for London Conf, printed in Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins,* pp. 603–05.

[50] (1) Min, Combined Staff Conf at 10 Downing St., 20 Jul 42; Rev Min, Combined Staff Conf London, 22 Jul 42. OPD ABC 381 BOLERO Sec 2. (2) The Americans had arrived at their position in discussions first by those in London, then by conferences of both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the London group, 18–19 July, and phrased it in a memo of 21 July prepared by Lt. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower and others for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. CinC AF Diary, 18–21 Jul 42. (See Note on Sources.)

[51] Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins,* pp. 610–11. Cables from British intelligence agents were shown to Hopkins at the Prime Minister's request and indicated that a group of highly placed French officers and most French nationals in North Africa would welcome and aid an American, but not a British, expedition.

[52] Msg, President to Hopkins, Marshall, and King, 23 Jul 42. WDCSA 381 Sec 1.

[53] Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare,* pp. 273–86.

[54] This agreement was in conformity with Memo [No. 4], CG ETOUSA for Marshall, 23 Jul 42, sub: Survey of strategic situation, in CinC AF Diary, 23 and 27 Jul 42. This memo, prepared for use after the earlier American position had been rejected, took a skeptical view of the Russian capacity to fight through 1943 unaided.

Africa, and others, to the Pacific where they were greatly needed.

On 25 July the Combined Chiefs of Staff named the prospective operation TORCH and agreed to a system of command to be in effect in one phase during the planning, and in another, "after the decision to mount." [55] But the President disregarded the conditional nature of the Combined Chiefs' decision, and on the same day informed Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, Admiral William D. Leahy, Lt. Gen. Henry H. Arnold, and Lt. Gen. Joseph T. McNarney, when they met him at the White House, that he had already committed the United States unconditionally to the North African operation.[56] After General Marshall and Admiral King returned from London, the former apparently still believing that the final decision to mount the North African invasion was to be reached on 15 September, the President repeated "very definitely" to a special conference of representatives of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the White House "that he, as Commander-in-Chief, had made the decision that TORCH should be undertaken at the earliest possible date. He considered that this operation was now our principal objective, and the assembling of means to carry it out should take precedence over other operations. . . ." [57]

President Roosevelt's action amounted to a modification of the Combined Chiefs of Staff's recommendation so drastic as to be almost a rejection. He did not then realize, as he came to appreciate later, that a campaign to seize French North Africa would preclude an attack across the English Channel toward the heart of Germany in 1943, and that he had made a choice in favor of the strategy of encirclement rather than that of a direct and central thrust. But he could indeed have pointed out that the decision to penetrate the Mediterranean conformed to the grand strategy formulated in January at the ARCADIA Conference if not to the modification of April. The Allies would be closing the ring around Germany, tightening it, and achieving readiness for an invasion to destroy her military power.

[55] CCS 33d Mtg, 25 Jul 42.

[56] (1) Msg, McNarney to Marshall, WD to CG ETOUSA, 25 Jul 42, CM-OUT 7303. CM-IN and CM-OUT numbers used in the footnotes of this volume refer to numbers appearing on copies of those messages in General Marshall's In and Out Logs, filed in the Staff Communications Office, Office of the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army. (2) The President so acted on the advice of Hopkins who cabled from London without the knowledge of General Marshall and Admiral King. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, p. 611.

[57] (1) CCS 34th Mtg, 30 Jul 42. (2) Memo, Gen Smith for JCS, 1 Aug 42, sub: Notes of conf at White House at 8:30 P.M., 30 Jul 42. OPD 381 (7-24-42) Sec 4-B. (3) JCS 27th Mtg, 4 Aug 42.

CHAPTER II

Strategic Planning

Beginnings of the Allied Force

A period of uncertainty followed President Roosevelt's decision that Operation TORCH should immediately be made a paramount undertaking to be launched at the earliest possible moment. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were not convinced of the finality of this decision until 30 July. Although they informed the British Chiefs of Staff of it the next day, an official communication to the Prime Minister was delayed for a week during Joint Chiefs' studies to ascertain the actual earliest possible date for the attack. Choice of a commander in chief was therefore retarded. The agreement reached by the Combined Chiefs of Staff in London on 25 July had provided for one American supreme commander over both ROUNDUP and TORCH, pending the decision to mount the latter, and for an American to be supreme commander of TORCH but a temporary vacancy to prevail in the supreme command of ROUNDUP, after such a decision.

The British proposal that General Marshall be named supreme commander and that Lt. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower be his deputy was never discussed with General Marshall by the President. Instead, the President approved the designation of General Eisenhower to be Allied supreme commander of TORCH. That he would do so was indicated on 31 July, but official action awaited an exchange of messages with the Prime Minister on 6 August. Both leaders then also agreed that the invasion should occur as early in October as might prove feasible, rather than on 30 October, as estimated by the military planners.

A directive from the Combined Chiefs of Staff to General Eisenhower was not approved until 13 August, almost three weeks after the decision to launch the invasion. Meanwhile, General Eisenhower assumed the leadership on a provisional basis in formulating an outline plan acceptable to the Combined Chiefs of Staff. But the organization of a staff, selection of major commanders, elaboration of operational plans and orders, arrangements for specialized training, and provision of matériel and transportation went forward rapidly only after the uncertainty surrounding the supreme command had been terminated.[1]

[1] (1) Cbl, McNarney to Marshall, 25 Jul 42, CM-OUT 7303. (2) CCS 33d (with Annex) and 34th Mtgs, 25 and 30 Jul 42. (3) Memo, Gen Smith for JCS, 1 Aug 42, sub: Notes of conf at White House at 8:30 P.M., 30 July 1942; Msg, JSM to COS, 31 Jul 42, JSM 329. OPD 381 (7-25-42) Sec 4-B. (4) Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate*, pp. 449–51, 526, contains messages exchanged between the Prime Minister and the President and Field Marshal Sir John Dill on the subject of command over Operation TORCH. (5) JCS 28th Mtg, 11 Aug 42, Item 13; JCS 36th Mtg, 13 Aug 42, Item 5. (6) CCS 103/1. This is the 13 August 1942 Directive for the Commander in Chief, Allied Expeditionary Force. (7) Cbl, Marshall to Eisenhower, 14 August 42, CM-OUT 4312. (8) Capt. Harry C. Butcher, *My Three Years With Eisenhower* (New York, 1946), pp. 32 (25 Jul 42), 36–39 (31 Jul 42).

General Eisenhower's Directive

A strategic (or outline) plan for Operation TORCH was in preparation for six weeks before Allied agreement was reached on 5 September. Once again, the President and the Prime Minister had to intervene to resolve a wide divergence in the views of the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

General Eisenhower's directive of 13 August described his mission as gaining, in conjunction with Allied Forces in the Middle East, complete control of northern Africa from the Atlantic to the Red Sea. The first stage would be to establish firm, mutually supported lodgments in the Oran–Algiers–Tunis area on the north coast, and in the Casablanca area on the northwest coast, in order to have readily available good bases for continued and intensified air, ground, and sea operations. A second stage was to extend control over the entire area of French Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, and in case of hostile action by the Spanish, over Spanish Morocco also. The Allies would thus create conditions favorable for further offensive operations through Libya against the rear of the Axis forces in the Western Desert. The ultimate objective would be "complete annihilation of Axis forces now opposing the British forces in the Western Desert and intensification of air and sea operations against the Axis on the European Continent." [2]

The Objective

Northwest Africa's three major political divisions—Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia—were all under European control.[3] Most of the region was within the empire of France, but Morocco was divided into three separate sections of which only one was French. It was much the largest. About 5 percent of Morocco was dominated by Spain. The third section, a very small zone adjacent to the port of Tangier, was legally under international guardianship, but since June 1940 was in the military possession of Spain. Between Morocco and Tunisia lay Algeria. It was the most nearly French. Its maritime border section comprised three of the departments of the Third French Republic sending representatives to the prewar legislative assemblies in Paris. Native or naturalized French citizens formed over 10 percent of its population. A Governor General and a French military administration governed directly its southern provinces.

Morocco and Tunisia were nominally ruled by the absolute authority, civil and religious, of native rulers, the Sultan of Morocco and the Bey of Tunis. Actually, in the capital of each, the French maintained a Resident General who conducted all foreign relations and supervised, by means of a French staff, the civil administration by native officials.

The population of the three colonies totaled approximately 16,700,000, of which all but 1,500,000 were either Berber or Arabic Moslems. Only 175,000 of the 6,500,000 inhabitants of French Morocco were French by birth or naturalization; a

[2] CCS 103/1, 27 Aug 42, sub: Opn TORCH.

[3] Topographical and other geographical information on which this section is based will be found in the following: Report on Tangier, Spanish and French Morocco, C. B. 4096 E; Report on Algeria, C. B. 4096 L, Pt I; and Report on Tunisia, C. B. 4091 I (X)—all of Inter-Service Information Series (British). See also: G–2 WD, Survey of Northwest Africa, 20 Aug 41, 2 vols.; OSS African Sec, Morocco, rev 6 Oct 42, State Dept R & A 686, 2 vols.; and Algeria and Tunisia, 26 Aug 42, State Dept R & A 687, 2 vols. All rpts in G–2 WD Documents Library.

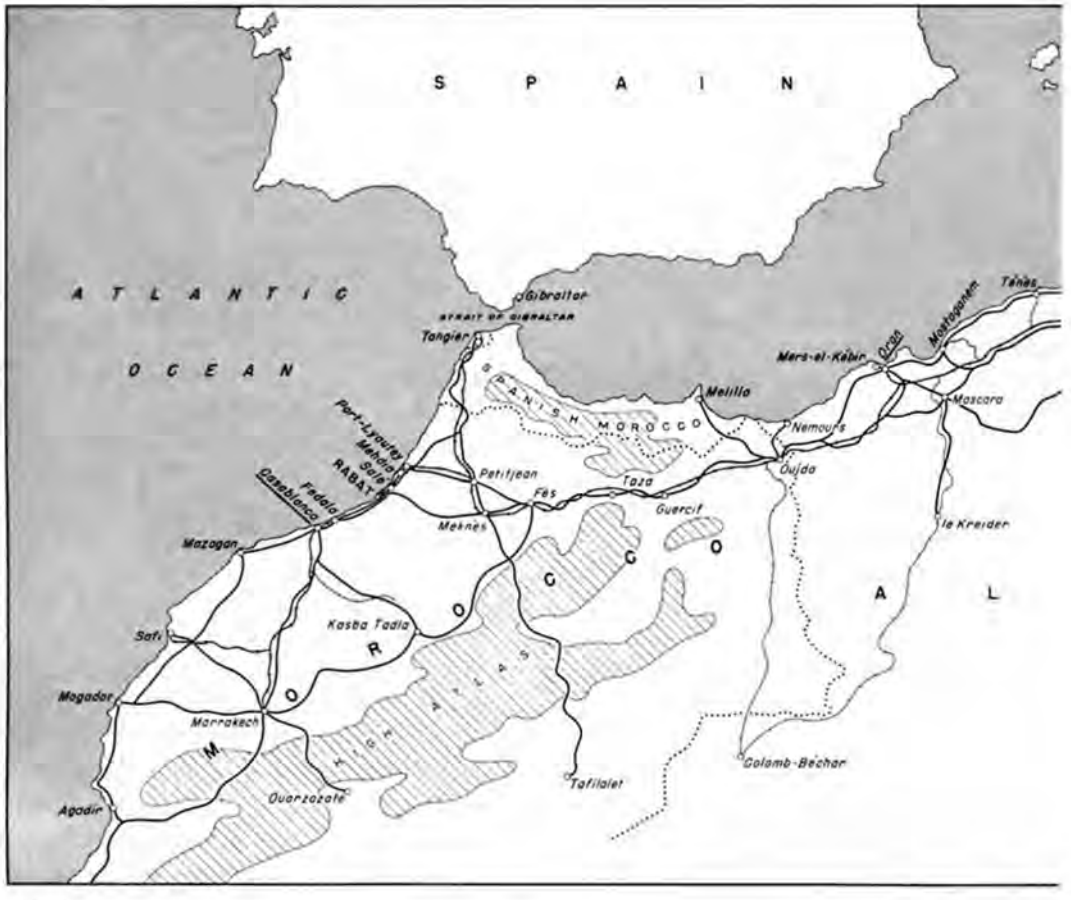
mere 110,000 of the 2,700,000 in Tunisia could be so classified. Between the Moslems and the native Jews, relations were always discordant; anti-Semitism was not a Fascist importation. In addition to the numbers given here in round figures, military personnel and refugees from Europe added an increment of undeterminable size.

The ring of territories adjacent to the desert was kept at all times directly under military control, stemming from the headquarters of the Commander in Chief of all French Army forces in North Africa, at Algiers. In November 1942 this officer was Gen. Alphonse Juin. In 1940, beginning with the arrival of Gen. Maxime Weygand as Commissioner-General under Marshal Pétain, and again in 1942, at the instigation of Adm. Jean François Darlan, high officers of the Army or Navy replaced civilians in almost all the leading administrative positions. The Resident General for Morocco at Rabat was Gen. Auguste Paul Noguès, and for Tunisia at Tunis, Vice Adm. Jean-Pierre Estéva. While the Governor General of Algeria was a civilian, M. Yves Chatel, his cabinet was headed by Vice Adm. Raymond Fenard.

The Combined Planning Staff in London had to develop an outline plan for TORCH which was adapted to a large and complex area comprising more than 1,000,000 square miles (1,074,238). The distances were considerable. From Casablanca to Tunis, for example, is 1,274 miles by motor road and over 1,000 miles by airline. Safi, a south Moroccan port, lies near the thirty-second parallel, north latitude, corresponding to that of San Diego, California, while Algiers, Bizerte, and Tunis are near the thirty-seventh parallel, the latitude of San Francisco and St. Louis. Because of unfavorable geographical conditions, the population is concentrated in a small part of the total area, principally at the ports. The coast of Morocco on the Atlantic side is fairly flat and open, but on the Mediterranean side, from a point opposite Gibraltar to another about 150 miles to the east, the crescent-shaped mass of the lofty Er Rif mountains effectively bars access to the interior. Thence eastward as far as Tunisia, coastal ranges, occasionally interrupted by plains and narrow river valleys, drop sharply into the Mediterranean. In Algeria and Tunisia, this belt of rugged terrain forms the northern portion of the Région du Tell (maritime Atlas mountain area), a group of parallel bands of mountains and valleys between the sea and the region of high plateaus.

Rising near the ocean in southern Morocco and stretching northeastward for more than a thousand miles are the masses and high crests of the Atlas Mountains. At one point they approach so closely the Er Rif mountains of Spanish Morocco that only a limited defile, the Taza gap, permits access from the plains of French Morocco to the Algerian Région du Tell. Northwest of the Atlas Mountains, within French Morocco, are two main regions. Along the coast is a level plain crossed by meandering streams, a plain which extends inland most irregularly and lies below Morocco's rugged counterpart of Algeria's high plateaus. This second region is severely eroded, with large areas of bare rock, of steep-sided valleys, and of thin-soiled hills. The terrain is so difficult that for centuries, travelers between northern and southern Morocco have skirted along its coastal rim.

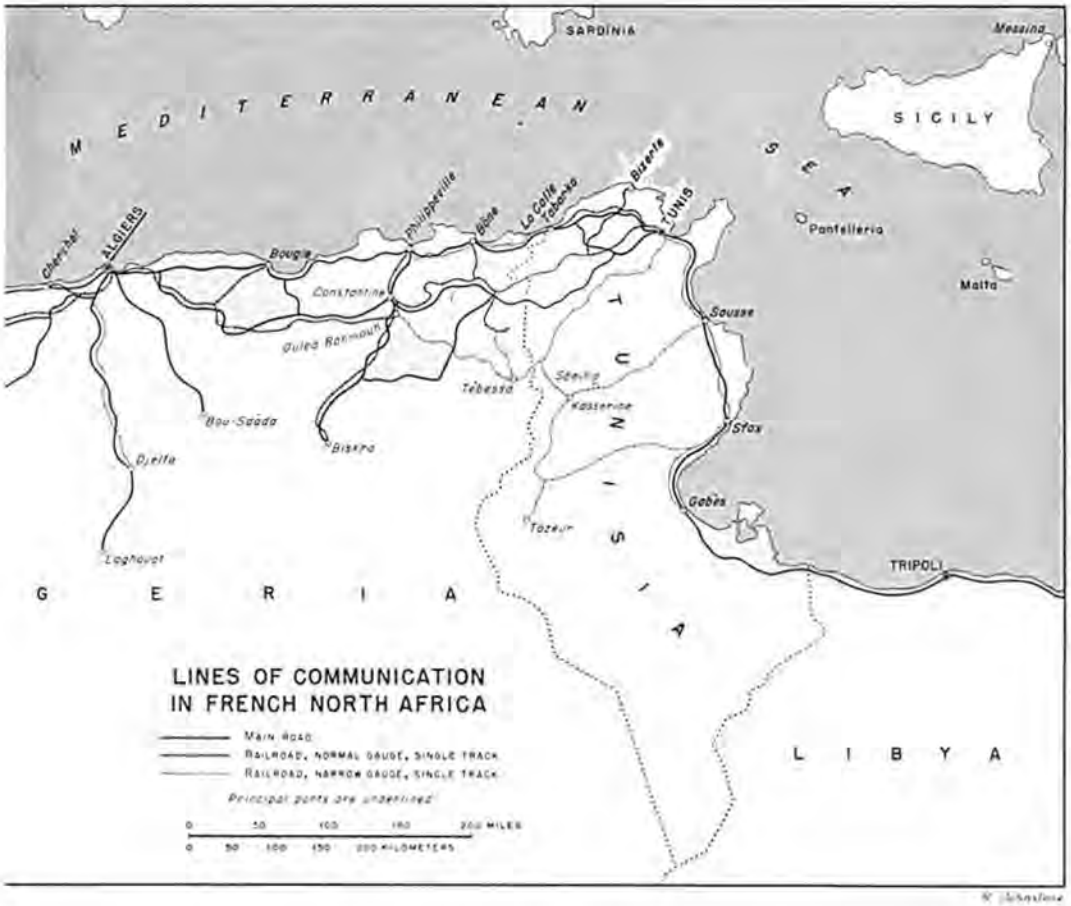
The Atlantic coast of Morocco has few capes or headlands and no natural harbors. Strong winds and extremely heavy swell and



MAP 1

surf prevail. Artificial ports, protected by breakwaters and dredged to suitable depths, were constructed by the French, especially during the regime of Marshal Louis Lyautey after World War I. Their location was determined not by coastal features but by the nature of the adjacent hinterland. Casablanca surpassed all other ports in area, depth, loading facilities, and storage capacity. It handled almost 90 percent of Morocco's prewar traffic and served as the gateway for overseas shipments to all northwestern Africa. Lesser ports were Safi, Rabat–Salé, Mehdia, and Port-Lyautey, the last of which was several miles up the shallow Sebou river from its mouth at Mehdia.

None of Morocco's rivers are navigable for a substantial distance. The railroad system which linked these ports with the hinterland and with Algeria and Tunisia had as its main line a standard-gauge, partly electrified route which ran from Marrakech through Casablanca, Rabat–Salé, and Port-Lyautey to Oujda. One branch ran to Safi,



a second to Tangier, and others to interior communities. Invading forces of any size would need to control the ports of Safi, Casablanca, and Port-Lyautey.

The Algerian coast faces the Mediterranean Sea with many headlands but no deep indentations. At the few points at which plains or valleys lead inland from the wide bays, artificial ports have been constructed or natural harbors improved. The best unloading facilities and railroad connections, the planners recognized, were at Oran, Algiers, Bougie, Philippeville, and Bône. (*Map 1*) The main line of railroad ran eastward from Oujda, near the Moroccan boundary, through Tlemcen to Oran, thence through interior valleys some twenty miles south of the coast to Algiers, Sétif, and Souk Ahras, from which it crossed northern Tunisia through Bédja to Bizerte and through Medjez el Bab to Tunis. Branch lines of one-meter gauge connected lesser ports, such as Nemours, Beni Saf, Arzew, Mostaganem, and Cherchel with the main line.

In Tunisia almost all the railroads were narrow gauge. Such a line followed the coast from Tunis southward through Sousse and Sfax to Gabès, with branches westward from Sousse to Kasserine, from Sfax to Gafsa and Tozeur, and from Tunis by a great southerly loop to Tébessa and Constantine in Algeria. From this loop ran several short branches. Thus all the major ports, Bizerte, Tunis, Sousse, and Sfax, were linked with the main system from Morocco and with communities situated in the valleys of central and western Tunisia. For forces invading Tunisia overland from the west, they furnished meager assistance to any large-scale movement. It was clear to the planners that the sea approach must be used as far as possible and that the limited railroads would require supplementing by maximum use of the highways.

The main highways system consisted of one east-west coastal route and one interior and roughly parallel route, the two being linked by numerous interconnections. Surfaced with bitumen, with the bridges capable of at least twenty-five-ton traffic, these roads were used by an active autobus system and could support two-way traffic at most points. But they did have bottlenecks—one-way bridges, tunnels just large enough for one bus, and sharp turns high on the sides of precipitous mountain gorges. From Souk et Tnine northeast to Djidjelli on the coastal route, the road ran in a notch excavated in the side of a cliff for nearly thirty miles. High passes were subject to snow blockades in the winter months. Alternative stream crossings, in case of the failure of any highway bridges, involved steep-sided river beds which could be forded only in dry summer weather, or deep gorges which might best be spanned by adapting railroad bridges to motor traffic also.

In addition to these roads of the main system, a highway ran from Constantine to Tébessa in eastern Algeria, and thence to the Tunisian coast at Gabès via Gafsa, or at Sfax or Sousse via Sbeïtla. Much of this particular route was newly widened, graded, and surfaced as a military road. The secondary roads in general lacked surfacing or drainage which would keep them passable in wet weather under heavy motor transport; even in dry weather, they were incapable of relieving much of the pressure on the main system. Northwest Africa's highways therefore would be adequate only if favorable weather prevailed for the very heavy traffic to be expected in the drive eastward into Tunisia. But those facilities were further limited by the restriction to two main routes, and counterbalanced also by the great distances involved. From Algiers to Tunis the distance was over 540 miles, and from Philippeville to Tunis more than 240 miles. Oran was 270 miles west of Algiers, and Casablanca, 458 miles farther still. An occupying force seeking to bring Tunisia under control by moving overland from Algeria and Morocco must bring with it an impressive volume of vehicles and be well prepared for highway maintenance.

Of the airdromes in French Morocco five were considered to be first class, those at Marrakech and Meknès, about seventy to eighty miles inland, and at Cazes (near Casablanca), Rabat–Salé, and Port-Lyautey on the coast. The field at Port-Lyautey was the only installation with concrete runways, but all five were large enough for bombers and in dry weather would be usable. The first-class airdromes were accessible by railroad and highway. Five other large fields in French Morocco were classed as secondary for lack of equipment, inaccessibility by land, or obstructions to ready

approach by air. At most of the ports were seaplane anchorages, and at Port-Lyautey such a station had once been heavily used by the French.[4]

The three primary airdromes in Algeria were at La Sénia (near Oran), at Maison Blanche (near Algiers), and at Les Salines (near Bône). Somewhat less usable were the inland airfields at Blida (25 miles from Algiers) and Sétif (about 30 miles from the Golfe de Bougie). Secondary fields capable of extension and development included those at Tafaraoui (16 miles southeast of Oran), Constantine, and Tébessa. Seaplane stations had been developed at Oran, Arzew, Algiers, and Bône.[5]

Tunisia's air facilities included primary airdromes at Sidi Ahmed (near Bizerte) and El Aouina (near Tunis), secondary airdromes at Kairouan and Gabés, and seaplane stations at Bizerte, Tunis, and Sousse. On the flat coastal plain were many operational fields and landing grounds capable of extension and development.

French forces for the defense of North Africa had been restricted by the terms of the armistice with Germany in 1940 and were understood in 1942 to include an army of 120,000 men. Of these troops, 55,000 were believed to be in Morocco, 50,000 in Algeria, and 15,000 in Tunisia when the basic planning began in London.[6] Twelve units of motorized field artillery had been allowed but almost no medium and no heavy artillery. Mechanized cavalry had at its disposal between 120 and 160 obsolete tanks and 80 armored cars in Morocco, about 110 such tanks and 60 armored cars in Algeria, and only 20 armored cars in Tunisia. In each of the three colonies, one regiment of antiaircraft artillery was dispersed, although at the ports supplementary batteries were manned by naval personnel.

Estimates of French air strength varies, but most of it was understood to be concentrated at the Moroccan airdromes. From 155 to 170 combat planes could be expected at the first contact, and within two hours after the alarm, from 166 to 207 additional aircraft from stations inland.[7] Of these, almost half were thought to be Dewoitine 520 fighters, superior in maneuverability to carrier-borne Navy fighters.[8] Approximately the same number were believed to be twin-engine bombers. All French combat planes would be manned by able pilots.

If German planes should also respond to an early warning issued from an intercepting submarine or from a long-range air patrol a few days before the convoys completed the approach, and should the Germans use Spanish and Spanish Moroccan airdromes for their concentrations, their air superiority over Morocco could be overwhelming during the attack. The margin of that superiority would be limited only by the size of the stocks of aviation fuel and bombs available to several hundred aircraft.

[4] Description in OSS, African Sec, Morocco, 190ff; and in G–2 WD, Survey of Northwest Africa, I, 73ff. G–2 WD Documents Library.

[5] The analysis of air facilities in Algeria and Tunisia is based on OSS African Sec, Algeria and Tunisia, 26 Aug 42, Vol. I, Pt. 2.

[6] (1) Data from AFHQ Intell Rpts 1 and 2, 11 and 18 Sep 42. (2) Slightly lower totals, based on troops actually present, are given in Pierre Barjot, *Le débarquement du 8 Novembre 1942 en Afrique du Nord* (Paris, 1949), pp. 28–30.

[7] (1) AAF Intell, Study of Axis Air Capabilities in Opposing Allied Landings Against Northwest Africa, 11 Aug 42. OPD TF "A" Rcds. (2) Memo, Rear Adm Henry Kent Hewitt to CinC US Fleet, 7 Sep 42, sub: TORCH Air Requirements. Div of Naval Hist. (3) Telgs, USFOR to AGWAR, 7 Sep 42, CM-IN 2710, and 8 Sep 42, CM-IN 3628.

[8] The Dewoitine fighter was a low-wing, all-metal monoplane which had a reputed range of 500 miles, a speed of 340 miles per hour, and a ceiling 32,500 feet.

Political Considerations

The nature of the Allied objective in Northwest Africa prescribed an expedition which had to operate initially at widely separated points located in three distinct political units, all subject to the authority of the French government at Vichy. All three had to be brought under control either by substituting Allied for French authority as a result of a victory in arms or by enlisting the French in the war against the Axis powers without disturbing their control over the restless native populations. To achieve control by a victory in arms would manifestly require a large force at the outset and then a rapid build-up.

Plans for French North Africa had to take into account political conditions throughout the whole French empire. The French people had not been unified by the disaster to their nation. Even before the defeat of 1940 factionalism arising from the revolutionary social currents of the times was rife, and a proud and patriotic people was torn by mutual distrust. These attitudes prevailed in defeat. The situation was aggravated after defeat by conflicting views over the best way to serve French interests while the country was partly occupied by an enemy still engaged in war against a former ally. Differences over these issues engendered bitter hatreds. The Allies in planning for Operation TORCH sought to collaborate with friendly segments of the armed forces, of the public administration, and of various civilian organizations in French North Africa. Among the available French leaders through whom they might effect this collaboration, Gen. Charles de Gaulle was bound to be considered.

Just before the Germans completed their conquest of France, General de Gaulle escaped to England, where he laid plans for the liberation of his country by organizing into a fighting force all Frenchmen willing and able to bear arms against the Germans. On 18 June 1940 he made a now-famous appeal to his countrymen by radio. As hostilities in France were being concluded, and while Pétain, after the Franco-German armistice, was setting up a government at Vichy in that part of France not occupied by the Germans, de Gaulle's group in England was also taking form. The General was recognized by the British Government as "Chief of all the Free French, wherever they may be, who may join you to defend the Allied cause" (7 August 1940). The Free French, however, considered themselves more than a voluntary association opposed to the Axis; they assumed that their leaders headed the true, legally constituted government of France. The Vichy government they denounced as part of the Fascist-revolutionary movement in Europe and without legal foundation. Their own establishment, organized in September 1941 as the French National Committee and formally recognized by most of the Allied governments, was represented as the continuation of the legitimate government of which M. Paul Reynaud had been the Premier until his resignation. In the United Kingdom, the Fighting French, as they thereafter preferred to be termed, were supported by the British and, indirectly, through lend-lease channels by the United States. At various points in the French empire, colonial governors adhering to General de Gaulle made local resources available for the Allied effort to defeat the Axis powers.

The U.S. Government established channels of communication with General de Gaulle purely as a military leader for the discussion of matters having military sig-

nificance. Responsibility for the liaison was placed upon Admiral Harold Stark,[9] chief of the United States Naval Mission in the United Kingdom. Conversations with General de Gaulle and with members of his organization during the months preceding the invasion of French North Africa yielded information of considerable value to the Allies.[10]

The Vichy government led by Marshal Pétain was accepted by the United States as the successor in fact to Reynaud's government under the Third Republic. Diplomatic representation was maintained at Vichy, both before and after Pearl Harbor. A settled purpose of American diplomacy was to maintain pressure upon Pétain's government to uphold the terms of the armistice, to deny the Axis powers any assistance and any privileges not pledged in that document, and to insist that the Axis powers confine themselves to only those concessions granted as a condition for laying down French arms. The objective central to all American policy was to prevent Axis use of French colonial territories and of the French fleet.[11] An important secondary consideration was to obtain through French governmental channels in Vichy all possible information concerning Axis plans and activities. The Marshal's government countenanced the Economic Accord of March 1941, negotiated by Mr. Robert Murphy, U.S. envoy, and General Weygand, Vichy's proconsul at Algiers. It arranged for the importation into French North Africa of limited quantities of consumption goods for local use. Twelve economic vice-consuls, supervising the distribution of such imports to see that none passed into Axis possession, reinforced the regular consular establishment in providing a staff of propaganda and intelligence agents. With the secret operatives of Allied governments, they could participate in subversive operations as well as espionage. They established valuable ties with resistance organizations. They thus could supply data for planning and agents for executing the plans.

Devotion to the Marshal was particularly strong in the armed forces of Vichy France in both the unoccupied portion of Metropolitan France and in the colonies of French West Africa and French North Africa. According to the prevailing opinion, de Gaulle and his following were engaged in dividing and weakening France, undermining its proper leadership, and compromising its ability to contribute effectively to its own liberation.[12] The anti-Fascist aims of the resistance organizations undoubtedly attracted recruits but at the expense of antagonizing French authoritarians. Yet the government of a country at war with the Axis was obliged, in calculating how to overcome the Axis, to retain every possible advantage, to enlist all possible allies. For the United Nations, in 1942, to renounce the aid obtainable through friendly relations with the government at Vichy and to espouse the cause of Fighting France alone seemed quixotic. To scorn the limited but substantial contribution by de Gaulle's movement toward eventual victory would have been imprudent. In making war, what seemed fitting was to make use of what each side could contribute and to break with

[9] His Army associate was Brig. Gen. Charles L. Bolté.

[10] See, for example, the record of a conversation of 24 September 1942 in COMNAVEU, U.S.–French Relations, 1942–1944, App. B, Pt. I, pp. 45ff. OCMH.

[11] Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, p. 542.

[12] Such an attitude was, to be sure, the counterpart of the Free (or Fighting) French estimate of French groups other than their own.

Vichy, if at all, only at the last possible moment.[13]

The British Chiefs of Staff proposed and the Americans agreed that the Fighting French should not be apprised of the forthcoming operation until it had begun. This policy was adopted to avoid leakage of intelligence to the enemy,[14] but it was further warranted by the complexion of French political opinion in French North Africa.[15] There, as elsewhere in the French empire, anti-Axis Frenchmen were divided. The monarchists were there, for example. Their claimant to the throne of France, the Comte de Paris, kept a residence in Spanish Morocco. The left wing was there. Both factions furnished recruits to a movement to terminate Marshal Pétain's fascistic revolution. Included in these two groups were some of de Gaulle's adherents, but the bulk of the French in North Africa were opposed to him in 1942. De Gaulle's followers had fought with the British against other Frenchmen at Dakar and in Syria, and that was held against him. If many opposed the Fighting French for their actions as renegades and rebels, much the greater number did so because of their profound faith in Pétain. The old Marshal was admired on the one hand because of his authoritarian reforms and on the other because of his policies toward the Axis, policies which were regarded as very shrewd. Pétain, they believed, was only yielding to the storm of necessity, bending only as far as he was pressed; and he was expected to straighten up as the pressure relaxed. His supporters were convinced that he, Weygand, and Darlan had held the Germans rather closely to the armistice terms, that he was able to dissemble his anti-Nazi feelings, and that he had France's best interests at heart. In the early autumn of 1942 the loyalty of most French inhabitants of the colonies in North Africa, including the most anti-German among them, was toward the government at Vichy.

During the planning for Operation SUPER-GYMNAST (one of the early plans for the invasion of North Africa) immediately after Pearl Harbor, the twelve economic vice-consuls in French North Africa were reinforced by agents of the American Office of Co-ordinator of Information, men who were sent to establish confidential relations with leaders among the natives and with resistance groups among the French. Coordination of secret intelligence and special operations by American and British agents was achieved through Lt. Col. William A. Eddy (Marine Corps), American naval attaché at Tangier. He kept in steady communication with a British counterpart in Gibraltar.

The initial purpose of the resistance organizations had been to oppose occupation of French North Africa by Axis forces, particularly by airborne elements. This goal was revised during the first four months of 1942 when an Allied expedition was in prospect. Their new mission was to assist Allied landings and, during them, to control pro-Axis segments of the North African population. Had the operation been undertaken in May 1942 the Allies might have found there a group of friendly French who were numerous, eager, and energetic. When the operation was postponed, Allied relations

[13] This is the thesis of Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble.*

[14] (1) COS (W) 241, 5 Aug 42. (2) Memo, Marshall for Dill, 7 Aug 42, sub: COS (W) 241. WDCSA 381 TORCH. (3) Memo, Marshall for President, 7 Aug 42, approved by "F. D. R." Copy in OPD Exec 5. (4) Msg, WD to USFOR, 8 Aug 42. OPD Exec 10, Item 36*a*.

[15] Butcher, *My Three Years With Eisenhower*, pp. 97–98.

with these resistance groups and American operations under the Economic Accord both suffered a relapse. Connections remained, nonetheless, which could be revived after the planning of Allied Force Headquarters for TORCH began.[16]

In French North Africa, the Allies hoped for weak French military resistance to TORCH which could be reduced further by (1) the intervention of friendly French resistance groups to sabotage the execution of French military defense plans, or (2) the enlistment of the French authorities in a common endeavor. The wide expanse of the area to be brought under control and the complex character of its non-European population made highly desirable the recruitment of the French North African territories as active allies.

Strategic Decisions

Allied strategic planning for TORCH began in London on 31 July, when a group of British and American officers constituting the Combined Planning Staff first met under the leadership of Brig. Gen. Alfred M. Gruenther. They prepared an exploratory plan which amounted to a modification of what the British planners had already sketched. It called for the seizure of two large and two small ports within the Mediterranean and a subsequent seizure of Casablanca. Four divisions were to be employed in the assault. Later convoys were to bring from six to eight more divisions The planners were convinced that insufficient naval escort ships for simultaneous landings on the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts made it necessary to postpone the Casablanca assault to a second phase. The Joint Chiefs of Staff immediately scrutinized the findings of the London planners, for they were obliged to find the earliest possible date for Operation TORCH consonant with a sound concept of the operation. The directive from the Combined Chiefs of Staff to the commander in chief had not yet been formulated, so that the mission was not yet firmly defined. On 31 July, planners in Washington expressed serious doubt about abandoning simultaneous assault landings on the western coast as well as inside the Mediterranean, but at the same time noted that some plan was essential in case unfavorable weather forced all landings to be made inside the Mediterranean. In this very first exchange of ideas, the four interrelated key issues thus arose: (1) the date for D Day; (2) the desirability of making all landings inside the Mediterranean; (3) the feasibility of making any outside landings on the Atlantic coast of Morocco; and (4) the amount of available naval escort, carrier-borne aircraft, and fire support.[17]

The earlier the operation could begin, the more likely that it would achieve some degree of surprise and, at the same time, benefit from the enemy's involvement with operations on the Eastern Front. After the middle of October, German air units might be expected to transfer from the campaign in Russia to the Mediterranean basin. Unless the Allies struck in French North Africa by then, the Nazis' pressure on the government of Spain would be stronger, and the inclination of the Soviet Union to drop out of the war might become greater. If some of the President's associates wished the operation to begin in time to affect the

[16] Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, pp. 180–225.

[17] (1) Msgs, USFOR to AGWAR, 30 Jul 42, CM-IN 10559, and 31 Jul 42, CM-IN 10945. (2) Msg, AGWAR to USFOR, 31 Jul 42, CM-OUT 0037. (3) Mark W. Clark, *Calculated Risk* (New York, 1950), pp. 43–53, indicates the effects of the uncertainties on the planning operations.

American Congressional elections in November, he himself seems to have left the decision to be controlled by military considerations. But he did not accept the advice of General Marshall and Admiral King that the earliest practicable date would be 7 November without careful analysis of the reasons offered for it.[18] The governing factor in this estimate was the length of time required to convert ocean liners to combat loaders (assault transports). For several more weeks Allied strategists sought persistently to have an earlier D Day through plans which would not require the use of these particular ships.

The operation might have begun earlier if the landings near Casablanca could have been either entirely dispensed with or postponed to a second phase of the attack, when it could be executed with some of the same shipping used in the first landings. The pressure for such a solution was strong, particularly in an early phase of the planning. The preliminary outline of 31 July proposed a deferred Casablanca landing, while the plan submitted to the Combined Chiefs of Staff with the date 21 August dropped the Casablanca landing altogether. The War Department planners insisted on including an attack to capture Casablanca, in order to insure a line of communications to the United States. They also insisted on its being simultaneous with the operations inside the Mediterranean, in order to make the maximum impression upon the French and Spanish authorities by such a show of force. In London, particularly among the British planners, the hazards to Allied control of the Strait of Gibraltar and of Gibraltar itself were deemed less substantial than they appeared to be in the thinking at Washington. In London they were aware, moreover, that the landings near Casablanca might well be thwarted by the incidence of unfavorable weather with high swell and tumultuous surf, and that the attempt to safeguard the Gibraltar area by such an expedition might thus be frustrated.[19]

The basic problem in this connection was to determine where the Axis powers would resist the Allied expedition. Would they appropriate airfields in Spain and neutralize Gibraltar by air attack? Would the Spanish assist them in a ground attack on Gibraltar, as Hitler had once expected, and perhaps by hostile action from Spanish Morocco as well? Or would the Germans and Italians focus their resistance in the Sicilian straits and northeastern Tunisia? The British concluded that the Spanish would do nothing and that the enemy's main opposition would come in Tunisia. The Americans were far less confident that the Spanish Government would actually remain neutral if the Germans wished to use Spanish territory, and far less certain that the German Air Force would not interfere with the vital activities planned at Gibraltar.[20]

The Allied planners also differed over the degree of haste necessary in entering Tunisia. In order to establish Allied military control over all North Africa, the Allied Force had to gain possession of Tunisia. British planners were convinced that if Axis

[18] (1) Memos, Marshall and King for President, 4 Aug 42, sub: TORCH, and 6 Aug 42, sub: TORCH. OPD Exec 5. (2) Ltr, Leahy to Marshall, 5 Aug 42. OPD ABC 381 Sec 4-B, Case 44. (3) Msg, AGWAR to USFOR, 6 Aug 42, CM-OUT 1632.

[19] (1) Memo with Ltr, Gen Sir Hastings L. Ismay to Eisenhower, 11 Aug 42. WDCSA 381 TORCH. (2) Msg, USFOR to AGWAR, 31 Jul 42, CM-IN 10945. (3) Msg, USFOR to AGWAR, 25 Aug 42, CM-IN 9526.

[20] (1) Msg, AGWAR to USFOR, 3 Aug 42, CM-OUT 0728; Msg, USFOR to AGWAR, 27 Aug 42, CM-IN 10397. (2) CCS 38th Mtg, 28 Aug 42.

occupation of Tunisia were not forestalled by elements of the Allied Force in the first assault, and with the support of the first follow-up convoys, the enemy would become too strong to dislodge without a protracted struggle. Landings as far to the east as Bône, near the border between Algeria and Tunisia, were therefore urged by them despite the likelihood of enemy air attacks. The Axis line of communication to Tunisia would be very short. The Axis rate of build-up could be much swifter. Time would be on the enemy's side. Against this view, the President and his military advisers believed that the enemy could land nothing of consequence in Tunisia except by air for the first two weeks.[21]

The first product of the Combined Planning Staff after the wholly tentative and incomplete sketch of 31 July was a Draft Outline Plan (Partial), Operation TORCH, of 9 August.[22] It prescribed a D Day of 5 November in order to make possible simultaneous landings both inside and outside the Mediterranean, at Bône, Algiers, Oran, and Casablanca. Two weeks of critical analysis, counterproposals, and revision followed, after which the Combined Chiefs of Staff received the full Outline Plan of 21 August accompanied by General Eisenhower's comments. These comments pointed out how tentative were some of the important provisions of the plan. They expressed his judgment that the forces provided by the two Allied governments were too small to carry out the mission stated in his directive. Landings near Casablanca had been abandoned in this plan in favor of but three attacks, all within the Mediterranean, at Oran, Algiers, and Bône. D Day was set at 15 October, the latest date holding promise of any beneficial consequences for the Soviet forces fighting the Eastern Front.[23] Another main factor affecting planning at this point was the grave shortage of naval components available for the Allied Force. When Eisenhower met in London with U.S. Navy representatives on 11 August, the Combined Planning Staff had not received an allocation of either Royal Navy or U.S. Navy units. The Commander in Chief, Allied Force, was then told that the difficulties facing the U.S. Navy in fulfilling existing missions and in furnishing a task force for the Casablanca attack would preclude its participation in any naval operations within the Mediterranean. At most, the U.S. Navy contemplated enabling one or two battleships from the British Home Fleet at Scapa Flow to see action in the Mediterranean with other elements of the Royal Navy by temporarily substituting American battleships for them at Scapa Flow. Apparently detecting an air of hesitation and of undue independence, Eisenhower emphasized that the U.S. Army and Navy were both under the President's explicit orders making TORCH an operation of the highest priority, that the British armed services were in a parallel position, and that the Combined Chiefs of Staff would require that the navies of both countries overcome all obstacles in executing the operation.[24]

Two days later, when a British aircraft carrier was sunk in the Mediterranean, the British Chiefs of Staff in London, with the American naval representatives concurring,

[21] (1) Msgs, USFOR to AGWAR, 25 Aug 42, CM-IN 9526, and 27 Aug 42, CM-IN 10397. (2) Msg, President to Prime Minister, 30 Aug 42. WDCSA 381 TORCH (8-31-42).

[22] OPD TF "A" Rcds.

[23] CCS 103 with incls, 25 Aug 42.

[24] Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, pp. 49-51 (11 Aug 42).

concluded that escort vessels, fire support vessels, and aircraft carriers would not be available in sufficient strength for two major landings on the Mediterranean coast simultaneous with an attack outside on the Atlantic coast. The inescapable choice confronting the planners lay between canceling any assault landings at Bône, or even Algiers, on the one hand, and omitting such landings near Casablanca, on the other. In the first formal complete Outline Plan (dated 21 August) the decision to seize Casablanca from the sea was abandoned, and the plan to land at Bône retained. An American task force was to sail for Oran from the United States, and the largest task force (American and British) was to sail for Algiers from the United Kingdom.

Planners also had to take into account one other consideration. Intelligence reports indicated that British forces would be vigorously resisted by the French. It was therefore deemed advisable to maintain, as far as possible, an American character for any Allied assault.

General Eisenhower was so dissatisfied with the draft plan that he requested a revised directive reducing his mission to proportions consistent with the resources made available to him. His strictures produced different responses in London and in Washington.[25] The British Chiefs of Staff abandoned their insistence on an early D Day, accepted the simultaneous landings near Casablanca which General Eisenhower had declared so necessary, and proposed a fifth, small-scale landing at Philippeville, between Algiers and Bône. These recommendations were contingent on the contribution of additional American naval forces.[26] The Joint Chiefs of Staff contemplated an all-American landing force attack at two points, Casablanca and Oran only. The American Chiefs were also prepared to adjust the commander in chief's directive, for the U.S. Navy could not meet the expanded requirements of the changes proposed by the British.[27] Discussion of the plan had reached an impasse, culminating in a long and perhaps at times acrimonious session of the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 28 August, when the President and the Prime Minister intervened.[28]

The Prime Minister returned to London late on 24 August from a visit to Marshal Joseph Stalin in Moscow. He had borne the brunt of the Russian dictator's invective over the Allied decision to occupy French North Africa rather than to open the promised "second front" in western France in 1942. He had enlisted Stalin's approbation of Operation TORCH by putting it in the best possible light. He found in London that the planning had swung toward a date much later than he deemed wise and a concept of the operation which overtaxed the resources thus far made available. In the employment of the actual means at hand, the Allied planners were in disagreement. His discussions with General Eisenhower and Maj. Gen. Mark Wayne Clark, and the impetus which he was able to give to the effort to find additional British naval resources accelerated the process of decision. Soon he and the President were engaged in

[25] (1) CCS 103, 25 Aug 42, Incl C, by Eisenhower, Clark, and Handy. (2) See Butcher, *My Three Years With Eisenhower*, pp. 68–69.

[26] (1) Msg, USFOR to AGWAR, 24 Aug 42, CM-IN 9341. (2) Clark, *Calculated Risk*, p. 46.

[27] (1) Msg, AGWAR to USFOR, 24 Aug 42, CM-OUT 7500. (2) Msg, USFOR to AGWAR, 25 Aug 42, CM-IN 9554. (3) Msg, AGWAR to USFOR, 25 Aug 42, CM-OUT 7858. (4) Msg, USFOR to AGWAR, 29 Aug 42, CM-IN 11,128.

[28] CCS 38th Mtg, 28 Aug 42, Item 6.

a daily exchange of cables which moved swiftly toward an Allied agreement. Mr. Churchill agreed that the British would accede to an American wish for an all-American assault, with British forces arriving after French acquiescence had been obtained, but at the same time he tried to make such a solution of the impasse among professional military chiefs unnecessary.[29]

On 4 September, the U.S. Navy reported the naval units which it could furnish.[30] At the same time, the President and Prime Minister were reaching an agreement upon three landing forces, mainly American, with a reduction of some 5,000 men each in those proposed for Casablanca and for Oran, thus providing the American element for the force to be landed near Algiers. Each would have an American commander. No landings would be made east of Algiers until it had capitulated, after which British troops would be carried to eastern Algerian ports and continue into Tunisia. The troops would be carried to the inside landings in British shipping, except for American vessels already in the United Kingdom and those in which one regimental combat team would be sent from the United States to Algiers via the United Kingdom. The outside landing would be made from an American convoy. The Royal Navy would furnish escort and support within the Mediterranean, as the U.S. Navy representatives had thought necessary since early August, while the outside landings would be escorted and protected by American warships.[31] One major point remained to be determined—the date of D Day. The Combined Chiefs of Staff finally gave responsibility for that choice to the Commander in Chief, Allied Force.[32]

The culminating Anglo-American executive agreement was formulated in a provisional outline plan at once, and eventually submitted on 20 September for official action by the Combined Chiefs of Staff.[33] Some fundamental questions remained to be settled, but the decisions of 5 September enabled the agencies of the two governments to proceed with operational and logistical planning and preparations on a firm basis after six weeks of delay and shifting uncertainty.

The concept of the operation and a general allocation of ground, sea, and air elements to the expeditionary force were now determined. The planned pattern of the assault cut down to the narrowest of margins the possibility of occupying Tunisia within a brief period of Allied superiority over the Axis forces likely to be sent there. If the initial attempt should fail, the operation would be protracted in proportion to the strength which the Axis powers chose to commit. Under the most favorable circumstances, advance forces would be established in northern Tunisia by mid-December, with a moderate number of aircraft operating against Axis supply lines into Tripoli and against Tripoli itself. These forces might consolidate the occupation of central and southern Tunisia as far as Gabès by the middle of January 1943. A corps of two British

[29] (1) Msg, President to Prime Minister, 30 Aug 42; Msgs, Prime Minister to President, 1 Sep 42, 2 Sep 42, and 4 Sep 42. OPD Exec 5, Item 2. (2) Msgs, USFOR to AGWAR, 3 Sep 42, CM-IN 1002, 3 Sep 42, CM-IN 1083, and 3 Sep 42, CM-IN 1094.

[30] Msg, AGWAR to USFOR, 4 Sep 42, CM-OUT 1673.

[31] (1) Msg, AGWAR to USFOR, 4 Sep 42, CM-OUT 1529. (2) Msg, USFOR to AGWAR, 6 Sep 42, CM-IN 2306.

[32] CCS 103/3, 26 Sep 42, sub: Outline Plan Opn TORCH.

[33] Copy in OCMH.

divisions could then be ready to move into Tripolitania at the beginning of March. The British Eighth Army, attacking westward, might by the most hopeful estimate arrive at Tripoli in mid-January. Military control of northern Africa from the Atlantic to the Red Sea would by such a schedule be achieved at the earliest by March, and might take considerably longer, with a corresponding drain on Allied military resources.[34]

Strategic decisions which remained for determination until near the end of the planning period included those governing relations with the French. The initial contacts between armed forces defending French North Africa and those of the Allies were bound to produce problems of a most delicate character. What would Allied policy be toward French airplanes or submarines met at sea? How should French merchant ships be treated? Should French warships be fired upon before they opened hostilities? If the Allied convoys were too passive, damaging blows might be struck before they could hit back; but if they acted aggressively, they might promote a battle which neither side desired.

The directive covering the treatment of the French armed forces during initial contact was drafted finally on 5 October.[35] No offensive action was to be taken against them by the Allies unless in reply to definitely hostile action. French warships, therefore, were to be allowed to pass undeterred through the Strait of Gibraltar and even north of the thirty-sixth parallel, north latitude, and to move past Allied convoys without interruption if they kept clear after being so warned. Should they fail to keep clear, they were then to be destroyed but Allied ships were to avoid, as far as possible, firing the first shot. Unescorted submarines outside territorial waters and darkened ships which withheld identification would be treated as hostile. French airplanes would be treated as hostile when approaching Allied ships or Gibraltar prior to the landings. Once the landings began, airplanes, merchant ships, and naval vessels which were preparing to get under way, or which disregarded orders from an Allied commander; any ship which attempted to scuttle itself, or which failed to identify itself properly if encountered at night; and any shore battery or other defensive installation or moored vessel on which activity indicated hostile intentions—all were at once to be treated as hostile. No action against French air bases would be taken before the assault, but Gibraltar would be defended against air attack at all times.

Once it was deemed necessary to engage in offensive action in a certain area, the action was to be opened with maximum intensity and pressed with the utmost vigor until all active resistance was terminated. Commanders were empowered to interpret the hostile action of one unit in an area as an indication of similar intent on the part of all other units in that area if attendant circumstances seemed to justify such an interpretation. When the resistance ceased, offensive action was also to be suspended until

[34] (1) AFHQ G–3 Outline Plan C (Provisional) for Opn TORCH, 5 Sep 42. Copy in OPD ABC 381 (7–25–42), Sec 4–A; (2) CCS 103/3, 26 Sep 42, sub: Outline Plan Opn TORCH.

[35] (1) CCS 103/6, 4 Oct 42, replacing CCS 103/5 on the same subject, was approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff and the President and forwarded to the British Chiefs of Staff in London and the Prime Minister, 5 October 1942, to be transmitted by them to General Eisenhower if they approved. (2) Msg, AGWAR to USFOR, 5 Oct 42, CM-OUT 1578. (3) Previous discussions appear in: (a) Msg, AGWAR to USFOR, 27 Sep 42, CM-OUT 9160. (b) CCS 41st Mtg, 28 Sep 42, Item 3 and Annex. (c) CCS 42d Mtg, 2 Oct 42, Supp Notes.

its resumption clearly became necessary. Unnecessary damage to ships and harbor installations was to be avoided by every possible precaution.

A rather detailed set of rules covering the treatment of Vichy French merchant shipping was drafted at Allied Force Headquarters, but later these were rejected by the Joint Chiefs as unnecessarily restrictive upon the commander in chief; the accepted principles of international law were to be followed by him, and need not be spelled out.[36]

The ultimate status of the French colonies and of the government at Vichy was a question of high policy for decision by the President and the Prime Minister. Were the Allies going to bring into existence an independent French government in French North Africa, rivaling that of Vichy, or were they even to promote the disruption of the government at Vichy? The President, when faced with this issue, finally asserted that he had no policy to acknowledge other than that of defeating the Axis powers and of preserving French administration in the French colonies. The propaganda plans were adjusted to bring them into full conformity with this policy, submitted to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, and the resulting directive was issued by Allied Force Headquarters as its General Order 4.[37]

The occupation of French North Africa was, in accordance with the strategic decisions reached during the planning phase, to be executed by forces of both the United States and Great Britain, and directed by an Allied commander in chief aided by a combined staff of both nationalities. The three major objectives of the assault landings were Algiers, Oran, and Casablanca, each to be taken by a force under an American ground commander. The Eastern Assault Force attacking Algiers would contain British and American troops, landing from British and American transports, protected by British naval elements, and supported by British air units, initially carrier-borne and later land-based. The Center Task Force attacking Oran was to consist of American ground troops, conveyed and supported by the Royal Navy, and aided by British carrier-borne and American land-based aviation. The Western Task Force attacking Casablanca was to be American in all three components. Allied leaders hoped that the French forces in North Africa would at first either welcome the invasion or at most furnish but nominal resistance, and that in the end they would join the Allies in military operations for the liberation of France. The Allies would therefore approach French North Africa prepared to fight but preferring an amicable association in arms.

[36] (1) JCS 39th Mtg, 27 Oct 42, Item 9. The paper circulated on this subject was CCS 103/12. (2) Msg, Eisenhower to CCS, 24 Oct 42, NAF 21.

[37] (1) Memo, Col W. J. Donovan for WD, 8 Sep 42, sub: Psychological Warfare for North Africa, listed in Msg, AGWAR to USFOR, 24 Sep 42, CM-OUT 08287. (2) Memo, Brig Gen A. M. Gruenther for Brig Gen John R. Deane, 15 Oct 42, sub: Revised Psychological Warfare Plan, with attached: Joint Amer–British Plan for Psych Warfare for France and the Fr Empire (rev) and Draft Outline Working Plan (rev). OPD Exec 5, Vol. III (1942 Misc). (3) Memo, Gruenther for Deane, 19 Oct 42. OPD 381 TORCH. (4) JCS 139, approved 4 Nov 42. (5) Telgs: AGWAR to USFOR, 13 Oct 42, CM-OUT 04062; USFOR to AGWAR, 11 Oct 42, CM-IN 04484.

CHAPTER III

Tactical Plans and Political Preparations

At the same time that major strategy decisions were being made, command organization, tactical planning, and preparation for political activity were also going forward at lower military levels. For the planning to proceed with the greatest efficiency, directives to the various task force commanders should first have been formulated. Then, as indicated by subsequent World War II experience, from three to five months would have been required to complete tactical plans and mount the expedition. The Army commanders would have selected the beaches to fit schemes of inland maneuver, subject to their suitability for naval operations, and once that major problem was solved, correlated joint decisions would have established: the time of landing (H Hour), detailed requirements, assignment of assault shipping, plans for general naval bombardment, and specific organization by tasks, including the furnishing of naval gunfire, air support, transportation, supply, medical service, administration, and communications.[1] In planning for Operation TORCH, there was no time for this orderly sequence.

The pressure after the first decision in July to have tactical plans ready for the earliest possible D Day made impossible any waiting for directives or fundamental decisions concerning the general outline plan. Tactical and logistical planning began almost at once. Efforts to keep abreast of the shifting concept of the operation prior to 5 September produced a dizzying confusion which was accentuated by the dispersal of the planning staffs at several points on either side of the Atlantic.[2]

Organizing the Chain of Command of the Allied Force

General Eisenhower's command was officially designated by the Combined Chiefs of Staff to be that of Commander in Chief, Allied Expeditionary Force. For security reasons, he altered the title to Commander in Chief, Allied Force. The original plan to have a deputy commander in chief from the British Army was dropped on British initiative in favor of an American, one able to retain the American character of the expedition in case General Eisenhower was prevented from exercising his command by disability. General Clark (U.S.) was then appointed Deputy Commander in Chief, Allied Force, and took charge of the details of planning.[3] Headquarters was established

[1] U.S. Navy Dept CNO, Amphibious Warfare Instruction (USF 6), 1946, pp. 3–21.

[2] (1) Clark, *Calculated Risk*, p. 48. (2) Butcher, *My Three Years With Eisenhower*, pp. 56ff., utilizing Clark's daily reports as Deputy CinC AF to the CinC AF.

[3] (1) Ltr, Gen Clark to author, 12 Apr 49, cites entry in his diary of 11 August 1942 for confirmation of his appointment. (2) Clark, *Calculated Risk*, p. 42. (3) The abbreviations (U.S.) for American and (Br.) for British will be used to indicate nationality.

at Norfolk House on St. James's Square, London, somewhat apart from General Eisenhower's offices as Commanding General, European Theater of Operations, U.S. Army (ETOUSA). There the staff was gradually assembled, the American personnel being diverted in large measure from other assignments which had brought them to the United Kingdom. British personnel was obtained through the War Office from headquarters, offices, and units at home. Official activation did not occur until 12 September, when in General Order 1, the command announced its own birth, gave itself a birth certificate, and officially took the name of Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ). It was then one month old.[4]

The staff was organized on the principle of balanced national participation. Divisions and procedures were typical of the U.S. Army rather than of the British Army. Operating sections of the general and special staffs were integrated; that is, they were manned by nationals of both countries in equal numbers but without duplications of function. If the chief of a section was of one nationality, the deputy chief was of the other, and their subordinates were each matched by "opposite numbers." Administrative and supply sections, on the other hand, were normally divided into separate segments concerned with the forces of each nationality, because of differences in organization, procedure, and channels of communication. General Eisenhower procured the assignment as chief of staff of Brig. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith (U.S.) upon his release from the secretariat of the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington.[5] The two deputy chiefs of staff were Brig. Gen. Alfred M. Gruenther (U.S.) and Brig. J. F. M. Whiteley (Br.). A British chief administrative officer, Maj. Gen. Humfrey Gale, was included in the organization. The heads of the G–1 and G–4 Sections reported through him. The G–2, G–3, and other sections reported to the Chief of Staff directly.[6] AFHQ deviated from the principle of balanced national personnel only in cases where specialized knowledge of organization, technique, and procedure was the overriding consideration.[7]

The Allies faced a complex problem of command structure in trying, as General Eisenhower desired, to fuse into one integrated force the ground, sea, and air elements of the two national military establishments. The principle of unity of command required that the task force attacking each major area should operate under a single commander and that the entire Allied Expeditionary Force under the supreme commander should avoid subdivisions along either national or service lines which seriously impaired the tactical flexibility. Normal national susceptibilities made desirable the retention of American or of British elements in the largest feasible units under their own commanders, and efficient performance made such action mandatory.

Completing a chain of command for Operation TORCH took several weeks. In the end, the American Commander in Chief, Allied Expeditionary Force, exercised direct command over the commanding generals of the task forces, indirect command through a British Naval Commander in Chief, Expeditionary Force, over the senior naval commanders of both nationalities, and direct command over land-based

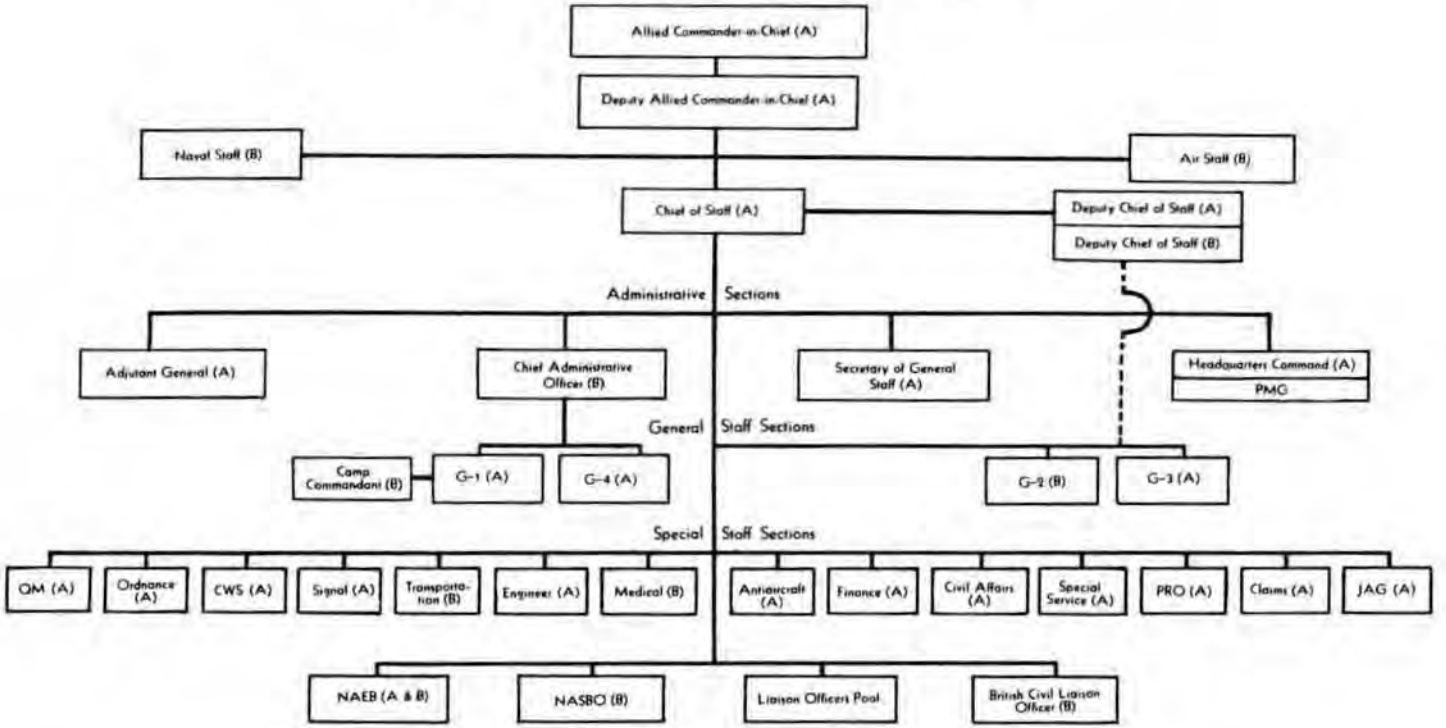
[4] History of Allied Force Headquarters, Pt. I, August 1942–December 1942, pp. 3–4, 18, 23–26. DRB AGO.

[5] General Smith reported on 15 September 1942, relieving General Clark. Hist of AFHQ, Pt. I, p. 18.

[6] See Chart 1, p. 34.

[7] See Hist of AFHQ, Pt. I, pp. 13–14.

Chart 1—AFHQ Organization, 1 November 1942



Note: The letters in the lower right of each box indicate the nationality of the chief officer and not that of the personnel as a whole.

aviation through British and American air force commanders. The task forces, after being reinforced by increments from later convoys to the captured ports, were expected to extend their control ashore and to be consolidated into an American Fifth Army and a British First Army. The naval task forces would eventually disperse, but subsequent naval operations by other units were to be under the control of the supreme commander through his naval commander in chief.[8]

The initial selection of task force commanders was made in the expectation that there would be but two, one American and one British, Maj. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr. (U.S.) and Gen. Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander (Br.). In quick sequence, the British found it necessary to substitute Lt. Gen. Sir Bernard Montgomery (Br.) for General Alexander, and then Lt. Gen. Kenneth A. N. Anderson (Br.) for General Montgomery, in order to transfer them to missions of higher priority.[9]

When the plans prescribed a third task force, to be drawn from American resources, the U.S. II Army Corps, which was then in the United Kingdom preparing for the cross-Channel invasion of France, was given the new assignment. General Clark, who had commanded the II Corps in England since June, eventually forfeited the command of this task force because he recognized that his responsibilities as Deputy Commander in Chief, Allied Force, were incompatible with those of the task force commander.[10] General Marshall selected Maj. Gen. Lloyd R. Fredendall (U.S.) to command the Center Task Force.[11]

The Eastern Task Force which General Anderson was to command was not expected to participate as such in the amphibious phase of the assault on Algiers. It was to be preceded by a smaller force, with as high a proportion of American troops as possible, under an American commanding general, and known as the Eastern Assault Force. Its actual commander was Maj. Gen. Charles W. Ryder (U.S.), since June the Commanding General, 34th U. S. Infantry Division, which was in training in the United Kingdom, presumably for the projected invasion of Continental France.[12]

[8] (1) CCS 75/3. (2) CCS 45th Mtg, 23 Oct 42. (3) Msgs: USFOR to AGWAR, 16 Aug 42, CM-IN 6000, and 7 Sep 42, CM-IN 2710; AGWAR to USFOR, 9 Sep 42, CM-OUT 3034.

[9] (1) Msg, AGWAR to USFOR, 31 Jul 42, CM-OUT 9255. (2) Butcher, *My Three Years With Eisenhower*, pp. 43, 45–46. (3) Fifty-six years old, General Patton had been a cavalryman prominent in the newer Armored force since his World War I service in France. At the time of his summons to Washington at the end of July 1942, he was commanding the I Armored Corps at the Desert Training Center in California, with corps maneuvers imminent. (4) General Anderson had entered the British Army in 1911. After serving through World War I, he rose to command the 11th Infantry Brigade in 1930 and the 3d Division in 1940 in France. He had also been the commander of British troops in Palestine in 1930–1932. When he assumed command of the Eastern Task Force he was in his fifty-first year.

[10] Ltr, Eisenhower to Marshall, 3 Oct 42. WDCSA 381 TORCH.

[11] General Fredendall, fifty-eight years old, with much experience in Army training, had succeeded Maj. Gen. Joseph Stilwell (U.S.) as the prospective commander of an American force in Operation GYMNAST, had worked at plans until that project was dropped, and had previously commanded the II Corps. General Marshall proposed him for task force commander, if needed, on 24 August 1942 (CM-OUT 7500). General Eisenhower requested him on 1 October 1942 (CM-IN 0176). Fredendall arrived in London on 9 October 1942.

[12] General Ryder was fifty years old, with a record of distinguished service in France in World War I, occupation duty in Germany, four years in China, and previous assignment as Chief of Staff, VI Corps, during 1941 maneuvers.

These four troop commanders—Patton, Fredendall, Ryder, and Anderson—were directly subordinated to General Eisenhower. His control over British ground forces was defined in directives from the British War Office to General Anderson and to a few other British Army officers:

> The First Army has been placed under the Supreme Command of the Allied Commander-in-Chief, Lieutenant General Dwight D. Eisenhower, United States Army. In the exercise of his command, the national forces at his disposal will be used towards the benefit of the United Nations and in pursuit of the common object. You will carry out any orders issued by him.
>
> In the unlikely event of your receiving an order which, in your view, will give rise to a grave and exceptional situation, you have the right to appeal to the War Office, provided that by so doing an opportunity is not lost, nor any part of the Allied Force endangered. You will, however, first inform the Allied Commander-in-Chief that you intend so to appeal, and you will give him your reasons.[13]

A naval task force was to land each of the three attacking forces at its objective and support it with naval gunfire and aviation. For the Western Naval Task Force Rear Adm. Henry Kent Hewitt (U.S.) was designated as commander. He was at that time the Commander, Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet, with headquarters at Ocean Beach, Virginia, charged with planning, training, and conducting amphibious operations.[14] He remained in that capacity pending the departure of his naval task force from the United States. The other two naval task forces (Center and Eastern) were drawn almost completely from the resources of the Royal Navy. The Center was under command of Commodore Thomas H. Troubridge (Br.) and the Eastern under Rear Adm. Sir H. M. Burrough (Br.).[15] General Eisenhower exercised command over the naval portion of the Allied Force through Admiral Sir Andrew Browne Cunningham (Br.),. Naval Commander in Chief, Expeditionary Force, subject to the limitation that control over the Western Naval Task Force and subsequent convoys from the United States was retained by the Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet, until they arrived at a "chop point" on the fortieth meridian, west longitude. Admiral Cunningham became responsible for sea security and amphibious operations to the supreme commander, but for other wholly British naval operations in either the western

[13] (1) Rev Draft Dir, COS to Anderson, 21 Oct 42. These paragraphs appeared unchanged in the actual directive sent to General Anderson, 23 October 1942. Identical paragraphs were contained in the COS directives to Lt. Gen. Mason MacFarlane (Br.) at Gibraltar and Lt. Gen. Frederick Morgan (Br.), Commanding General, Northern Task Force. Ltr, Director Mil Opns to Eisenhower, 28 Oct 42. See Hist of AFHQ, Pt. I, p. 10, 10n. (2) The relation of national to Allied commander was thus made more subordinate than in 1918 after an initial proposal that it remain the same. CinC AF Diary, 9 Oct 42.

[14] Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations,* II, 21–23.

[15] (1) TSD/Hist Sec Admiralty Naval Staff, Battle Summary 38, Operation "Torch," Invasion of North Africa, November 1942 to February 1943, B. R. 1736 (31), 1948 (cited hereafter as Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch"). Copy in OCMH. (2) Admiral Burrough, whose service in World War I included the Battle of Jutland, had already seen some bitter fighting in World War II off the Norwegian coast, on the hazardous Murmansk run, and in an August dash through the gantlet to Malta which persevered against extremely heavy Axis opposition. Commodore Troubridge had participated in Royal Navy operations in Norwegian waters in 1940 and in the expedition which seized Madagascar from the Vichy French in May 1942, an operation which had benefited materially from the success of a special raiding party of Royal Marines taken by destroyer directly into the port of Diégo-Suarez. See Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate,* pp. 233–34.

Mediterranean or the north Atlantic he reported directly to the British Admiralty.[16]

The land-based aviation in the Allied Force was first organized in two portions corresponding to the initial arrangement of task forces and to the prospective consolidation into British First and American Fifth Armies. The Eastern Air Command consisted of Royal Air Force units under the command of Air Marshal Sir William L. Welsh (Br.). A Western Air Command from the U.S. Army Air Forces (a new Twelfth Air Force) was put under Brig. Gen. James H. Doolittle (U.S.). Each was to report directly to General Eisenhower. The decision to employ a third task force necessitated a division of the Western Air Command, that portion assigned to the Center Task Force to be commanded during the assault by General Doolittle's operations officer, Col. Lauris Norstad (U.S.), and that with the Western Task Force under command of Brig. Gen. John K. Cannon (U.S.), each responsible directly to his task force commanding general. General Doolittle was expected to command the Twelfth Air Force from Gibraltar during the first phase of Operation TORCH. In the subsequent phase, its mission would be determined by contingencies for each of which it had to be prepared. It might have to support Allied operations against Spanish Morocco or Spain, and it might have to support ground operations in Tunisia before subjecting Italy and Rommel's supply lines in Africa to bombing attack. The Eastern Air Command was expected to work with General Anderson in winning the race with the enemy for Tunisia.[17]

Directives for Joint Action by the U.S. Army and Navy

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, successor after February 1942 to the Army-Navy Joint Board, directed such joint operations as those of the Western Task Force and Western Naval Task Force. Late in the planning, it validated arrangements already made, and formulated others, in a Joint Army-Navy Plan for Participation in Operation TORCH to which the short title, ROOFTREE, was given.[18] American military and naval support of Operation TORCH was itemized as follows:

(1) A Joint Expeditionary Force, including the Western Task Force and naval supporting units to seize and occupy the Atlantic coast of French Morocco;

(2) U.S. forces required in conjunction with British forces to seize and occupy the Mediterranean coast of French North Africa;

(3) Additional Army forces as required to complete the occupation of Northwest Africa;

(4) Naval local defense forces and sea frontier forces for the Atlantic coast of French Morocco and naval personnel for naval base maintenance and harbor control in the sector of the Center Task Force (Oran area);

(5) Logistic support for all United States forces.

Army forces placed under command of the Allied commander in chief were to be assigned directly by the War Department; and naval forces, by the Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet. The latter was to provide and to control the naval forces necessary for supporting Operation TORCH in the western Atlantic and for protecting the follow-up

[16] NCXF (Admiral Sir Andrew Browne Cunningham), Report of Proceedings, Operation TORCH, 31 Mar 43, with incls. AFHQ Micro Job 8, Reels 16A–17A.

[17] Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces*, II, 53–55.

[18] JCS 127/1, 13 Oct 42.

convoys between the United States and the North African theater. As soon as U.S. naval units completed their tasks they were to be released by the Commander in Chief, Allied Force.

The directive provided most clearly for command as follows:

(a) The Commander in Chief, Allied Force, will command all forces assigned to Operation TORCH, under the principle of unity of command.

(b) The Western Naval Task Force will pass to the command of the Commander in Chief, Allied Force, upon crossing the meridian of 40° West Longitude. This command may be exercised either directly by the Commander in Chief or through the Naval Commander, Allied Force. (Prior to that time these forces will remain under the command of the Commander in Chief, United States Atlantic Fleet, who will arrange their movements so that they will meet the schedule of the Commander in Chief, Allied Force.)

(c) Command relations of Subordinate Task Forces are initially set up as given in sub-paragraphs (d), (e), (f), and (g). They are subject to change as found necessary by the Commander in Chief, Allied Force.

(d) The command of those units of the Western Task Force which are embarked in the Western Naval Task Force, will vest in the Commander, Western Naval Task Force, until such time as the Commanding General, Western Task Force, has established his headquarters on shore and states he is ready to assume command.

(e) When the Commanding General, Western Task Force, assumes command on shore, the naval forces designated to give further support to the occupation of FRENCH MOROCCO will pass to his control, acting through the Commander, Western Naval Task Force.

(f) Following the assault operations and when and as released by Commander in Chief, Allied Force, the United States naval forces assigned thereto will revert to the command of the Commander in Chief, United States Atlantic Fleet.

(g) The United States naval forces assigned for the operation of ports and for naval local and sea frontier defenses—Sea Frontier Forces, Western Task Force, and the Naval Operating Base, Center Task Force—will be under the command of the respective commanding generals of those task forces, under the principle of unity of command.

(h) The Commander in Chief, United States Atlantic Fleet, will exercise command over all forces employed for the cover and ocean escort in the ATLANTIC of follow-up convoys between the UNITED STATES and NORTH AFRICA.

Planning responsibilities were likewise classified as follows:

(a) The Commander in Chief, Allied Force, will designate the tactical and logistic plans to be prepared by the task force commanders.

(b) The Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet, will be responsible for planning for the organization of United States Naval Task Forces to be assigned to the Commander in Chief, Allied Force, for the operations of the Atlantic Fleet (less the elements assigned to Commander in Chief, Allied Force) in support of Operation TORCH, and for subsequent covering operations and convoy escorts in support thereof.

(c) The Army will be responsible for planning for the logistic support and requirements of the Army Forces assigned to Operation TORCH.

(d) The Commander in Chief, United States Atlantic Fleet, will be responsible for planning for the logistic support and requirements of the United States Naval Forces assigned to Operation TORCH.

Transportation responsibilities were specified for both services. The Navy would furnish available troop transports, both combat unit loaded and organizational unit loaded, and converted cargo vessels, landing boats, tank lighters, and gear for unloading on beaches. It would also arrange for tankers to carry bulk petroleum products. The Army was to arrange for all other shipping which

its forces required, to provide gear for unloading at docks, and to allot such shipping space in later convoys for the requirements of continuing naval support in the theater, as might later be agreed. Vessels carrying Army troops, equipment, and supplies were to be loaded by the Army at ports designated by the Army, while sailing and routing of convoys would be controlled by the Navy in conformity with the convoy schedule issued by the Allied Commander in Chief. The Navy was responsible for unloading over beaches and the Army for unloading at docks.

Many of these decisions which were so carefully organized and formulated in Plan ROOFTREE in October had been made earlier by the Chiefs of Staff and by an Army-Navy TORCH Committee during the course of the planning and preparations.[19] The committee was an instrument for co-ordinating the planning within the two departments in conformity with decisions reached by the Commander in Chief, Allied Force, or by the Army and Navy task force commanders. The provisions for control of the Joint Expeditionary Force in accordance with the principle of unity of command, including arrangement for eventual transfer of command from Admiral Hewitt to General Patton, were finally set forth as an annex to the Navy's orders of 7 October 1942 from Admiral King to Admiral Royal E. Ingersoll, the Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet. On 10 October, Admiral Ingersoll transmitted them to Admiral Hewitt, as prospective commander of Task Force 34, Atlantic Fleet (the Navy's numerical designation for the Western Naval Task Force).[20] Issuance of this annex did not receive a formal concurrence by the War Department but its substance was considered sound, and its incorporation in Plan ROOFTREE followed almost at once. If General Eisenhower had had changes to urge, Patton would also have proposed revisions to make more precise the time for the shift of command from Hewitt to himself, and clearly authorizing him to release Navy forces in the event that communications between him and General Eisenhower should fail.[21]

In most of the joint amphibious exercises preceding World War II, the principle of unity of command in amphibious operations had not yet supplanted that of mutual cooperation. The doctrine on amphibious operations officially accepted in Joint Action of the Army and Navy was silent on this vital matter. Operation TORCH was to provide an important test of a moot feature of amphibious operations, the transfer of command during the critical establishment of the beachhead.

Western Task Force Planning

On 30 July, immediately after General Marshall returned to Washington from the decisive conferences in London, General Patton was summoned to the War Department to take charge of organizing the Western Task Force and of planning for its operations.[22] He spent a few days in conferences while Col. Hobart R. Gay, his chief of staff,

[19] Partial records of its meetings are in CNO, TORCH Planning Minutes. Div of Naval Hist, Env 96, Box 7, Job 4622.

[20] Copies in OPD Exec 5, Item 2, Tabs 13, 14.

[21] (1) Msg, AGWAR to USFOR, 9 Oct 42, CM-OUT 02981. (2) Eisenhower applied the same principle as that of the annex in Dir, CinC AF to Comdr WTF, 13 Oct 42. Copy in Col Gay Opnl Misc 1942 file, Kansas City Rcds Ctr.

[22] Transcript of phone conv, Gen Hull with Patton, 1045, 30 Jul 42. OPD Exec 8, Bk. 6.

and other officers summoned from the I Armored Corps, established a headquarters in the Munitions Building and devised a preliminary plan to capture Casablanca.[23] Patton met there for the first time his prospective associate commander, Admiral Hewitt.[24] With Col. Kent C. Lambert, who was to be his operations officer, he flew to England for participation in the planning at AFHQ.[25] The effort to arrive at a satisfactory strategic plan had not succeeded when on 20 August he returned to Washington. He carried with him a directive to prepare an attack against Oran instead of Casablanca,[26] in conformity with a provisional outline plan then being submitted to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by General Eisenhower. That directive was promptly superseded by another from the War Department,[27] but not until the executive agreement of 5 September was the objective of the Western Task Force firmly established.

The Western Task Force's mission was to secure the port at Casablanca and adjacent airfields and, in conjunction with the Center Task Force at Oran, to establish and maintain communications between Casablanca and Oran. (*See Map 1.*) It was also to build up land and air striking forces capable of securing Spanish Morocco, if that action should become necessary. French ground forces in Morocco were estimated to number from 55,000 to 60,000 troops, stationed along the border of Spanish Morocco, near the coast, and at inland stations such as Marrakech, Meknès, and Fès. French naval forces manned coastal defense guns and at Casablanca, as well as farther south at Dakar, had naval bases in which some powerful warships were moored. The partly completed *Jean Bart,* with radar and a battery of four powerful 15-inch guns, lay beside a dock in Casablanca Harbor. The damaged battleship *Richelieu* was based at Dakar. Each warship had a wide cruising range and sufficient power to be a serious threat to any offshore naval expedition. Several French submarines also lurked in Casablanca Harbor and might emerge for strikes against an invader. The French first-line aircraft in Morocco were estimated in September as 13 reconnaissance, 74 fighter, and 81 long-range bomber planes, based for the most part at Marrakech, Casablanca–Cazes, and Rabat–Salé.[28]

The great port and city of Casablanca was so strongly defended that direct frontal assault would have been extremely costly. The objective had to be attacked from the rear by forces landing near enough to reach it before the defenders could organize effective resistance. If the attacking forces used medium or heavy tanks in an overland approach to Casablanca, they would need a port, since landing craft for armored vehicles of those weights were not then available. Also, if they counted on land-based

[23] (1) Intervs with Col Gay and Col Halley Grey Maddox, 11 Feb 48. (2) Sgt Sidney L. Meller, The Desert Training Center and Calif.-Ariz. Maneuver Area, Hist Sec, AGF, Study 15 (1946), pp. 31, 103, citing records of phone convs, 7 Aug, 20 Aug, and 1 Sep 42. Camp Haan, Desert Training Center 319.1(2). (3) Memo, Patton for ACofS OPD, 3 Aug 42, sub: Notes on WTF—TORCH Opn. OPD Exec 5, Item 3, Tab 14.

[24] Interv with Admiral Henry Kent Hewitt (Ret.), 23 Jan 51.

[25] Interv with Col Maddox, 11 Feb 48.

[26] Dir, Clark to Patton, 19 Aug 42. OPD TF "A" Rcds.

[27] Dir, Brig Gen St. Clair Streett to CG WTF, 24 Aug 42. OPD Exec 8, Bk. 6.

[28] (1) For anticipated coastal defenses near the landing points, see pp. 100–101, 118–19, 154 below. (2) WTF Rpt, Analysis of Military, Civil and Economic Facilities, Sep 42. OPD TF "A" Rcds.

aircraft to support the attack, they had to have an airfield that could be captured quickly.

In trying to find a suitable port for the Western Task Force's medium tanks, the planners had few from which to choose. The Moroccan coast is exposed, with the only good harbors protected by jetties. All the ports near Casablanca are small, shallow, and inadequate. Safi, the most likely possibility of three ports along the coastal roads to the southwest, is 140 miles from Casablanca. The other two, Agadir and Mogador, are more than 200 miles away. Rabat, capital of French Morocco, is 53 miles northeast of Casablanca, and Port–Lyautey 25 miles farther by road. Both Rabat and Port–Lyautey were under consideration for some time before the latter was chosen. The small fishing and petroleum storage port at Fedala, on the wide Baie de Fedala, is only 18 miles overland from Casablanca, and seemed suited to serve the main infantry attack but not to receive the heavier armored vehicles. The beaches on the Baie de Fedala could accommodate the bulk of the invading force. Most of the coast line elsewhere is flanked by bluffs so near the shore that the beaches are shallow and the exits difficult. East of the Baie de Fedala, a broad shelf with only a few low sand hills extends inland for less than a mile before rising by rounded slopes to a plateau some two hundred feet above sea level. At this point, between two rivers, a considerable force might come ashore on a wide front and have room to maneuver while the small port was used to expedite the landing of heavy equipment. The medium tanks, however, would have to be landed far to the south at Safi.

The most accessible of the good airfields were on the edges of Casablanca and Rabat, but the former was too well defended and the latter was therefore initially preferred, although it necessitated an operation with certain doubtful features.

Rabat, the habitual site of the Sultan's palace, also served as the headquarters of the French Resident General. There too was the post of the commanding general of Moroccan troops. A battle for its capture might have brought injury to the Sultan with serious repercussions among the Moslem population throughout the Mediterranean. Its shallow port was below standard. It was likely to be defended more strongly than the harbor and airdrome just north of Rabat, at Mehdia–Port-Lyautey. The airfield at Port-Lyautey had concrete runways; the adjacent Sebou river had been developed as a seaplane base; the mouth of the river was flanked by excellent beaches; and any possible resistance to inland advance seemed likely to yield quickly to combined operations by parachute troops, saboteurs, carrier-borne aviation, and an amphibious landing force.[29]

The original sketch of a plan which General Patton took to AFHQ contemplated landings at Agadir, Mogador, and Safi, supplemented by airborne infantry and fighter aircraft flown from the United Kingdom via Gibraltar. The main weight of the attack would have been delivered well south of Casablanca. This conception was changed early in September. The whole attack was shifted northward, with the main effort to be at Fedala and the tanks to be landed in the port of Safi. The airfield at Rabat–

[29] (1) Memo, Truscott for Clark, 12 Sep 42, sub: Comments on WTF Tentative Plan (Outline Plan). AFHQ AG 370.3–21, Micro Job 24, Reel 79D. (2) Ltr, Patton to CinC Joint Opns, 24 Sep 42. AFHQ G–3 Ops 77/5, Micro Job 10A, Reel 23C.

Salé was to be the objective of a third force.[30]

General Patton was eventually induced to approve the substitution of Mehdia–Port-Lyautey for Rabat as the third objective of the Western Task Force. He assigned the command of the sub-task force (GOALPOST) which would make that attack to Maj. Gen. Lucian K. Truscott, Jr., who had been in the United Kingdom at Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten's Combined Operations Headquarters.[31] General Truscott returned to the United States on 19 September to organize and prepare for his part of the operation. The armored elements to land at Safi were included in a second sub-task force (BLACKSTONE) placed under command of Maj. Gen. Ernest N. Harmon, Commanding General, 2d U.S. Armored Division.[32] The main attack at Fedala (by Sub-Task Force BRUSHWOOD) was to be under the command of Maj. Gen. Jonathan W. Anderson, who at that time was Commanding General, Amphibious Corps, Atlantic Fleet, under Admiral Hewitt, and had been long identified with Army troop training for amphibious operations.[33] Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes was designated as Deputy Commanding General, Western Task Force.[34]

The major elements of the Western Task Force were transferred to General Patton's command from that of the Commanding Generals, Army Ground Forces and Services of Supply, at the end of 10 September. These units were the 3d and the 9th Infantry Divisions (less the 39th Infantry Combat Team, which was sent to the Eastern Assault Force at Algiers), the 2d Armored Division, the 70th and 756th Tank Battalions, the 603d, 609th, and 702d Tank Destroyer Battalions, the 71st and 72d Signal Companies, and the 36th Combat Engineer Regiment. The 3d Infantry Division was an early Army unit to be trained for amphibious operations while the 9th Infantry Division had already been partly trained, as had Combat Command B, 2d Armored Division. By 24 September, after prolonged uncertainty about the available troop trans-

[30] Ltr, Patton to Eisenhower, 10 Sep 42. Copy in OPD Exec 2, Item 9.

[31] Truscott, who was then forty-seven years old, had entered the Army in 1917 as a cavalry officer, was one of the Army's well-known polo players, and had experience with the 13th Armored Regiment and as plans and training officer of IX Corps at Fort Lewis, Washington, before going to the European Theater. He was to rise to command successively the VI Corps, Fifth Army, and Third Army.

[32] Harmon, then forty-eight years old, graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 1917, was commissioned in the Cavalry, served in France in 1918, studied or taught in various schools in the next decade, and graduated from the Army War College in 1934. He was to rise to command the XXII Corps in 1945 and to organize and command the U.S. Constabulary in Germany in 1946 before retiring to become president of Norwich University in 1950.

[33] Anderson, then fifty-two, graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1911, was commissioned in Field Artillery in 1912, and rose to the grade of lieutenant colonel in France during World War I. After graduating from the Army War College in 1930, he remained as an instructor and later taught for four years at West Point, and attended the Naval War College. He was assigned to the War Plans Division before going to the 3d Infantry Division and was later to command successively the X, III, and XXXVI Corps and the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center at Fort Sill.

[34] General Keyes, then fifty-four, graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 1913, saw service with the Pershing Expedition and elsewhere as a cavalry officer, attended the École Supérieure de Guerre in Paris, 1931–1933, and the Army War College, 1936–1937, before commanding a mechanized cavalry unit at Fort Knox, Kentucky. He had become Commanding General, 9th Armored Division, before becoming Patton's deputy commander, and was later to command II Corps in Italy and an Army in Germany during the occupation.

port, General Patton had assigned his units to the three sub-task forces in the form which would remain effective, in most respects, in the operation.[35] The Navy had readily agreed to furnish destroyer-transports to convey into Safi harbor before daylight two special landing teams of infantry for the immediate seizure of key positions in the port, and to forestall sabotage. The Army Air Forces had assigned the XII Ground-Air Support Command [36] under General Cannon to the Western Task Force and planned to send its ground personnel from the United States to meet the flight personnel at the captured airfields.[37]

Naval planning depended upon a settled scheme of maneuver by the landing force, a plan in conformity with which the combat loading, naval support, and naval air arrangements could be prepared. If the beaches which were best suited to the inland deployment of the troops were feasible for landing operations, the naval planning could proceed without delay. But when doubts arose concerning the character of any beach, more information had to be obtained. Photographic reconnaissance by British aircraft during the planning period clarified some doubts.[38] At least one beach, south of Safi, had to be studied from an American submarine. Alternate plans were therefore prepared to use that beach or another, depending upon the report.

Landing operations were subject to two hazards affecting the operation of all boats on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. The long fetch across the Atlantic makes a high surf and swell normal on that shore and, by November, limits the days when boats can possibly be navigated to perhaps one in five. The tide would be ebbing on 8 November during the early morning hours of darkness, so that, even with smooth water, landing craft would have to be speedily unloaded and retracted to avoid becoming stranded or even broached. To escape the latter difficulty, Admiral Hewitt recommended, somewhat to General Patton's dismay, that the operation be deferred one week. The proposal was discussed at higher Navy levels, rejected, partly because the moonlight on the later date would make surprise less likely, partly because of the narrowing likelihood of good weather, but mainly because delay would be generally inadvisable.[39]

The availability of troops and cargo transports was sufficiently uncertain to delay firm decisions. Interrelated with the transport problem was that of the troop list, which was subject to a stream of minor modifications up to the time of departure. A tentative troop list of 6 September was made the basis for a provisional assignment to transports with an estimated capacity of

[35] (1) Memo, ACofS OPD for CG's AGF and SOS, 2 Sep 42, sub: Prep of units for overseas service; Memo, ACofS OPD for CG's AGF, SOS, and TF "A," 3 Sep 42, issued 5 Sep 42, sub: Creation of TF. OPD 370.5 TF. (2) Ltrs, Patton to CinC AF, 24 Sep 42, and to CG's Sub-Task Forces and ASC, 10 Oct 42. AFHQ G–3 Ops 77/5, Micro Job 10A, Reel 23C.

[36] On 1 October 1942 the XII Ground-Air Support Command was redesignated the XII Air Support Command.

[37] General Cannon, then fifty, entered the Army in 1917 from the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, trained as a pilot in 1921, served in the Hawaiian Islands and Argentina, graduated from Command and General Staff College in 1937, and was Commanding General, I Interceptor Command, in 1942. He was later to command the Twelfth Air Force, 1943–1945.

[38] AAF Director of Intell Service, Photo Intell Rpt 99, 28 Sep 42, Defenses of Atlantic Coastal Cities in Northwest Africa. AAF Archives.

[39] Memo, Rear Adm Charles M. Cooke, Jr., for King, 29 Sep 42. Div of Naval Hist, Cominch 35, AC/S F–1.

2,679 officers and 42,090 enlisted men.[40] Some of these transports were still being converted from passenger liners to combat loaders, and would become available barely in time to load and depart with inexperienced crews.

The seatrain *New Jersey* solved the problem of medium tank transport, but one other special transportation problem remained unanswered until a few days before the Joint Expeditionary Force was scheduled to sail. That question was how to deliver aviation gasoline speedily to the Port-Lyautey airdrome for the land-based planes. These American aircraft were either to be flown from Gibraltar or, as actually developed later, to land after being catapulted from an auxiliary aircraft carrier at sea. The answer appeared to be to run a shallow-draft cargo vessel up the Sebou river to the docks near the airfield. Search for such a ship was successful; the *Contessa,* a fruit carrier normally plying between the Caribbean and the United Kingdom, was chartered, although it could not be brought to the port of embarkation until the day the convoy was finally loaded.[41]

Admiral Hewitt received an official letter of instruction dated 10 October 1942 designating him as commander of the Western Naval Task Force (Task Force 34, U.S. Atlantic Fleet) and indicating the ships which would be transferred to his command.[42] To expedite necessary action by subordinate commanders, his operations plans had already been issued the day before. The Western Naval Task Force, besides its Southern, Center, and Northern Attack Groups, was to contain a covering group and an air group. Standard operations annexes were included. But two major matters which had been under discussion ever since a conference of American and British naval officers in Washington on 16 September remained to be firmed up.[43] What would be done if the weather made the scheduled landings impossible? How should French forces be treated in case they resisted?

Alternative plans were necessary in case bad weather prevented the troops from being landed near Casablanca. The ships would soon have to refuel. Submarine attack would become much more likely during any prolonged waiting offshore. Of four possible alternatives, serious faults could be found with all; those most favored provided for landings inside the Mediterranean between Oran and Spanish Morocco, or in Spanish Morocco and southern Spain if the Spanish Government opposed the Allied operations. General Patton, after the subject had been thoroughly reviewed, concluded that the only tenable plan was "a direct naval attack on the moles at Casablanca and Port Lyautey. . . . We should plan either to conquer or be destroyed at Casablanca," he wrote.[44] He was so concerned lest the naval task force commander, during a failure of communications with General Eisenhower's command post at Gibraltar, insist on diverting the convoy from the primary objective that he sought a secret authorization from the Allied commander in chief to require the admiral to bombard

[40] The Western Task Force was eventually cut down to 33,843 men, including personnel of the XII Ground-Air Support Command.

[41] (1) Joseph Bykofsky and Harold Larson, *The Transportation Corps: Operations Overseas,* UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II (Washington, 1957). (2) Maj. William R. Wheeler, ed., *The Road to Victory* (Newport News, Va., 1946), Vol. I, Ch. VIII.

[42] See n.20.

[43] Mins are in CNO, TORCH Planning Minutes. Div of Naval Hist, Env 96, Box 7, Job 4622.

[44] Memo, Patton for Maj Gen Thomas T. Handy, 21 Sep 42. OPD Exec 5.

Casablanca. The request was met with the advice that no bombardment should occur without reference to General Eisenhower, but in the unlikely event of a complete failure of signal communications, he should use his own discretion.[45] To destroy Casablanca would have been entirely contrary to Allied policy, for the harbor was scheduled to serve as a major Allied base, and any destruction would have had an adverse effect upon relations with the French. Such an interference with the command relations prescribed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (in Plan ROOFTREE) could have had many regrettable consequences. But in view of the confidence which developed between General Patton and Admiral Hewitt during the approach voyage, and Admiral Hewitt's own determination to wait offshore until forced to leave, it is doubtful that such an authorization would have been used even if it had been issued.[46] The existence of approved outline plans for alternative operations was not known to Admiral Hewitt's planning staff or to General Patton's sub-task force commanders until the eve of departure, a fact which made hard work at drafting operations plans necessary during the voyage.

How should French forces be treated in case of resistance? The previously mentioned directive of 5 October to the Allied Force laid down three general principles: (1) the French must be permitted to take the first hostile action, (2) a hostile act by an isolated unit should not necessarily be interpreted as indication that all units in that area had hostile intent, and (3) once resistance in any particular area ceased, Allied forces should abandon hostilities unless the French resumed their opposition. The difficulty of this position was manifest. General Patton denounced the idea that his forces should wait for the French to fire. It would be tantamount, he said, to giving an opponent the draw in a gunfight. Many believed that the risks to naval units from enemy aircraft and coastal batteries were disproportionately high. But the entire force ought not to be precipitated into general attack by purely local resistance. Western Naval Task Force plans, as revised during the approach voyage, recognized the unmistakable directive to let the French start any fighting and instituted two signals—"Batter Up" and "Play Ball"—to govern American response.

Anyone about to return French fire could signal "Batter Up," while the task force and task group commanders would have discretionary authority to signal "Play Ball." The former indicated a local encounter; the latter, general American offensive action. One was a report; the other, an order.

General Patton interpreted the policy to his subordinate commanders as making necessary attempts to capture alive any foreign troops who did not resist but at the same time to avoid all unnecessary risk. "We must do our best to avoid combat," he said, "but not to the extent of endangering the lives of our troops." Enemy batteries or machine gun nests were, if merely trained on American troops, to be attacked unless the crews indicated a desire to parley. Use of antiaircraft weapons against the planes of the Western Air Command would be the signal for attack either on airfields or troop columns.[47]

[45] Msg, USFOR to AGWAR, 13 Oct 42, CM-IN 05483.

[46] Interv with Hewitt, 23 Jan 51.

[47] (1) Information supplied by Rear Adm Edward A. Mitchell, then Operations and Senior Plans Officer, Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet. OCMH. (2) Memo, Patton for Sub-Task Force and

General Patton's Outline Plan for the Western Task Force was ready for distribution on 16 October 1942.[48] It provided for simultaneous landings on beaches in the vicinity of Safi, Fedala, and Mehdia (west of Port-Lyautey). Subsequently, the Fedala force was to attack Casablanca from the east, reinforced by armored elements of the Safi force. Other elements of that force would prevent the enemy garrison at Marrakech from reinforcing the defenders at Casablanca. The Mehdia force was expected first to seize the airport at Port-Lyautey in time for its use as a base for aircraft not later than noon on D Day, and next to capture and occupy the airport at Salé, while protecting the northern flank of the entire operation. Five regimental combat teams, three armored landing teams totaling nine companies of tanks, and a reserve consisting of one battalion of combat engineers, one company of military police, and an antiaircraft battalion made up the three sub-task forces. They were to be carried in twenty-two combat-loaded transports, six cargo transports, and one seatrain.

The outline air plans for the Western Air Command provided for 160 short-range fighters, 13 fighter-observation aircraft, and 15 light bombers to be operating in the Casablanca area by D plus 6, beginning on D plus 2 and growing by daily flights from Gibraltar. When the French Air Force in Western Morocco ceased to be a threat, 80 of the fighters were to be shifted to the Oran area.[49]

Protection and regulation of coastal shipping after the occupation became a responsibility undertaken by the British for the Mediterranean and by the Americans for the Atlantic coast of French Morocco. The Sea Frontier Forces, Western Task Force, commanded by Rear Adm. John Leslie Hall, Jr., were established for the latter task, with a planned strength of two seaplane patrol wings, over forty patrol craft, mine sweepers, tugs, and salvage vessels, and approximately 5,600 officers and men. Admiral Hall's command was to maintain antisubmarine patrols, control harbors, operate base facilities at Port-Lyautey, Fedala, Casablanca, and Safi, and assist in local defense at each of them.[50]

Center Task Force Planning

The plans for taking Oran were devised in London in co-ordination with AFHQ by a planning group of the U.S. II Corps in September and early October. The group began with planning materials originally assembled for General Patton, but which were transferred to them when Casablanca finally and firmly supplanted Oran as the objective of the Western Task Force. The top planners included Cols. Arthur Nevins, Edwin B. Howard, Claude B. Ferenbaugh, and Clarence L. Adcock, and Lt. Col. Francis A. Markoe. Co-ordinated with their work was that of General Doolittle and Colonel Norstad for air, of British naval planners for convoy and ship-to-shore landing operations, Brig. Gen. Thomas B. Larkin for supply, and of the 1st Infantry and 1st Armored Divisions for their respective combat teams and other commands. Early in September, offices at Norfolk House were

AAF Comdrs, 19 Oct 42, sub: Policy toward French. Col Gay Opnl Misc 1942 file, Kansas City Rcds Ctr.

[48] Outline Plan TORCH, 8 Oct 42, Annex 6, 16 Oct 42. OPD 381 TORCH.

[49] Outline Plan TORCH, 8 Oct 42, Annex 1*a* to Annex 1 (Air Outline Plan), 20 Sep 42. OPD 381 TORCH.

[50] Sea Frontier Forces WTF, Opn Plan A–42, 16 Oct 42, with annexes. Copy in OCMH.

occupied by Maj. Gen. Terry Allen, commanding general of the 1st Infantry Division and his chief of staff, Col. Norman D. Cota; Brig. Gen. Lunsford E. Oliver, commanding general of Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division; and later by Col. Paul McD. Robinett, commanding officer of a segment of Combat Command B which was destined to operate for a time as a separate task force. The commanding general of II Corps, General Clark; the operations officer of AFHQ, Brig. Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer; and the chief of staff of II Corps, Brig. Gen. Lowell Rooks, supervised the planning and made the high level decisions.[51] General Fredendall, who was named late in the preparatory phase to command the Center Task Force, joined the planning group on 10 October, a few days before the final stage of ship loadings and landing rehearsals.[52]

Oran had a population in 1942 of over 200,000 with an eighteenth-century tradition of political subordination to Spain, followed by about a century of French rule. The site is on the southern shore of a wide bight between Cap Falcon on the west and Pointe de l'Aiguille on the east. (*See Map IV.*)* Two other headlands projecting into the bight subdivide it into three bays, and Oran is on the center bay, between Mers el Kébir and Pointe Canastel. The small secondary port of Arzew, about twenty miles east of Oran, nestles in the western shore of the Golfe d'Arzew, on the eastern side of a wide and hilly promontory. Topographical features furnish Oran natural protection of great strength. Looming above Mers el Kébir and Oran on the western side of the center bay are the crests of Djebel Santon and Djebel Murdjadjo.[53] These crests rise from a high and rugged hill mass sheltering the communities at its base and restricting access to Oran from the west to well-defined and narrow channels. Steeply sloping bluffs rim the southern and eastern shore of Oran's bay. Inland six to twelve miles from the coast, the plain bears a broad ribbon of shallow, marshy depressions and saline lakes, or sebkras. The largest of these sebkras is southwest of Oran, where it covers an area more than twenty-five miles long and from four to six miles wide, becoming wider and muddier after rainfall has drained into it from the closely adjacent hill mass west of Oran, but whitening and contracting during the drier summer season. Just north of the Sebkra d'Oran's western end lies the village of Lourmel, which in 1942 had a small airstrip. In a corresponding position north of the salt lake's eastern end is La Sénia, which had a more fully developed Army airfield. Several much smaller lakes and marshes lie inland from the Golfe d'Arzew, and eastward from Oran. Between them and the coastal hills is an area of flat, cultivated vineyards crossed by highways and branch roads. Masonry buildings and walls are characteristic of both the villages and scattered farms.

*Maps numbered in Roman are placed in inverse order inside the back cover.

[51] General Rooks, then forty-nine, entered the Army in 1917, served as an infantry officer in France, studied and taught at The Infantry School and the Command and General Staff College, and graduated from the Army War College in 1937. He became Chief of Staff, II Corps, in June 1942 after service at General Headquarters and Army Ground Forces. Later, he became G–3, AFHQ; Deputy Chief of Staff, AFHQ; Commanding General, 90th Infantry Division; and Deputy G–3, Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force.

[52] II Corps CTF, Roster of Officers, Warrant Officers, and Enlisted Men. DRB AGO 202–10.6. General Larkin of Services of Supply, ETOUSA, was prospective Commanding Officer, Mediterranean Base Section, at Oran.

[53] The word "djebel" is the customary French North African term for high hill or mountain.

The defenses of Oran included forty-five fortified coastal guns of considerable strength; and of Arzew, six more.[54] The most important were those on Djebel Santon, west of Mers el Kébir; on Djebel Murdjadjo, west of Oran; on Pointe Canastel, northeast of Oran; and on Cap Carbon, at the western edge of the Golfe d'Arzew. Fort du Santon had four 7.6-inch guns and a heavy concentration of antiaircraft artillery.

The Oran Division, estimated at 16,700, was stationed partly in barracks near the port and the main approaches to the city from southwest, south, and east, and partly at inland stations within one day's march. The Army airfield at La Sénia, about six miles south-southeast of Oran, and a Navy airfield at Tafaraoui, twelve miles southeast, as well as a naval seaplane base at Arzew, twenty-two miles northeast of Oran, were part of the defense system. About one hundred combat aircraft were normally based there. Landing strips at Lourmel, Fleurus, Oggaz, and St. Denis-du-Sig supplemented the airfields. At the western extremity of the harbor of Oran, and at the naval base of Mers el Kébir, several French naval vessels were usually moored.

The Center Task Force plan for seizing Oran prescribed a double envelopment by forces landing simultaneously at three major beaches and one minor beach, all in bays outside of the bight.[55] Total strength consisted of about 37,100 Americans and 3,600 British, including Royal Navy personnel in the landing craft. These forces were to push inland to seize airdromes and block approaches, and to drive along the coast to capture shore batteries. To gain and hold air superiority, the Center Task Force planned to use four elements: (1) an airborne force from the United Kingdom was scheduled to drop before daylight south of Oran, near La Sénia and Tafaraoui airfields; (2) armored columns were to drive directly from their beachheads to the same airfields and to the subsidiary airstrip at Lourmel, southwest of Oran, in support of the paratroopers, and to aid in defending the fields against counterattack; (3) from first light until darkness, dive bombers and fighters from three aircraft carriers were to neutralize the French airfields and clear the air of hostile aircraft; (4) as soon as an airfield had been secured, land-based planes of the Twelfth Air Force were to be flown in from Gibraltar.

While French air power at Oran was thus being eliminated, American ground elements were to secure the southwestern and southeastern flanks, to seize control of the high ground west of the city and of the port and village of Arzew, east of the city, and, by encircling the objective in conjunction with naval units off the coast, to isolate its garrison. The westernmost landing was to occur at Mersa bou Zedjar (X Beach) in a narrow bay about twenty-eight miles airline from Oran. In the bay of Les Andalouses, seventeen miles farther east, was Y Beach. From Cap Carbon and along the southwestern sector of the Golfe d'Arzew as far as St. Leu, about twenty-two miles airline easterly from Oran, lay Z Beach, to be used by the bulk of the attacking force.

Light armored columns were to be brought to X and Z Beaches on modified Lake Maracaibo oil tankers, forerunners of the famous Landing Ship, Tank (LST). Through openings in the bows, the tanks could move over ponton bridges to shallow water, cross the beaches, shed their waterproofing equipment, and press inland. More

[54] See p. 193 below.

[55] CTF FO 1, 4 Oct 42.

than half of the armor of Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, in the Center Task Force, including all the medium (M3) tanks of the 2d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, were aboard transports for discharge at a dock in Arzew harbor. These medium tanks were barely too large to clear the openings into the Maracaibos.

At Les Andalouses, one regimental landing team (Combat Team 26) was scheduled to come ashore and drive eastward to seize the fortified coastal batteries on Djebel Santon and Murdjadjo and engage French defenders along the roads over the hill mass west of Oran. Southeast of Cap Carbon, four companies of the 1st Ranger Battalion were to land near the 4.1-inch battery of Fort du Nord, to capture it, and to occupy the high ground commanding the town and harbor of Arzew, while two companies seized the other battery near the harbor level. From Arzew to St. Leu, in addition to the armored column, two regimental landing teams (Combat Team 18 and Combat Team 16) and other ground troops were expected to land, to capture Arzew and its port, to occupy flank-protecting positions, and to close in on Oran from the east and southeast. In so doing, they would gain control of a small airstrip at Oggaz and traverse an area containing several villages.

The British Admiralty was to furnish the units of the Center Naval Task Force (with minor exceptions) to convey the troops and their matériel, using American troops of the 1st Engineer Special Brigade as hatch crews on ten of twenty-three troop transports and as operating crews for some of the landing craft.[56]

The Center Naval Task Force was planned to consist of 61 escort and 9 combat-transport ships, and 34 merchant vessels. Commodore Troubridge would command it from the special headquarters ship, *Largs*. The battleship *Rodney* and the fleet aircraft carrier *Furious* were the 2 capital ships assigned to this force, with 2 auxiliary aircraft carriers, 2 cruisers, an antiaircraft cruiser, an antiaircraft ship, 13 destroyers, 26 lesser vessels, 10 motor launches, and 2 submarines to engage in protective tasks. Commodore Troubridge's force was subdivided into ships carrying assault personnel and landing craft for initial landings at the four beaches, groups of motor transport and tank landing ships expected to discharge before daylight, and vehicle and personnel carriers scheduled to begin debarkation at the Golfe d'Arzew after daylight.[57]

The shift of command from Commodore Troubridge to General Fredendall was to occur as soon as the latter felt that he could control the situation ashore. His troops were to pass to his control as soon as they reached the beaches.[58]

Operation RESERVIST, a direct assault on Oran Harbor by two small shiploads of American troops and naval personnel under Royal Navy Command, with the mission of forestalling sabotage in the port, was appended to the Center Task Force plans late in the period of preparations. The port of Oran was vital to the program of logistical support. Serious risks to prevent its being wrecked by scuttled ships and demolished facilities were deemed justifiable. That the bold entry into a defended harbor by two light vessels with a few hundred men as passengers was deeply hazardous, if not

[56] (1) Brig Gen Henry C. Wolfe, Lessons from Operation TORCH, 30 Dec 42. (2) Brig. Gen. William F. Heavey, *Down Ramp* (Washington, 1947), p. 30.

[57] Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch."

[58] CinC AF Diary, 5 Oct 42.

foolhardy, was well recognized. Strong objections were overruled.[59]

Although the British assumed the responsibility of protecting and controlling coastal shipping along the Mediterranean shores, following the occupation of French North Africa, Oran was to be an American-operated supply base. Rear Adm. Andrew C. Bennett (U.S.) as Commander, Advance Group, Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet in the United Kingdom, was ordered to organize an advance U.S. naval base unit including a harbor patrol and detachment to operate one major and three minor ports in the Oran area.[60] He assembled at Base Two, Rosneath, Scotland, for departure as part of the Center Task Force, a total complement of 82 U.S. Navy, 3 U.S. Marine Corps, and 9 U.S. Army officers, 520 U.S. Navy, 30 U.S. Marine Corps, and 209 U.S. Army enlisted men. The Army personnel was taken from elements of the 1st Engineer Amphibian Brigade, which had been placed under his command upon its arrival in the United Kingdom. Admiral Bennett was to be responsible to General Fredendall.

At Oran, land-based aviation from Gibraltar would begin with one group of fighters arriving by D plus 2, and reach a total of 160 short-range fighters, 13 observation-bomber aircraft, and 13 medium bombers within a week. These aircraft were to be supplemented by another 80 fighters as soon as conditions nearer Casablanca allowed them to be flown from that area. Almost daily increments would build up a total American air strength in North Africa of 400 long-range and 240 short-range fighters, 228 medium bombers, observation-bombers, and photographic reconnaissance planes. Of these 1,244 aircraft, 282 were to be reserves for wastage. The planes would be flown by seventy-one squadrons in nineteen groups, and used for fighter defense, Army co-operation, tactical and strategic bombing, long-range reconnaissance, and airborne operations. General Doolittle's headquarters was at first to be at Gibraltar, then shift to Oran.[61]

Planning for Operations at Algiers

In planning for the operations at Algiers, Allied capacity for co-operation was subjected to a substantial test at the outset. Planning began before the executive agreement of 5 September with the assumption that the operations would fall to a British force to be led by Lt. Gen. Kenneth A. N. Anderson (Br.) as Commanding General, British First Army. Almost a month of work by First Army planners on the project preceded the decision on 5 September that during the assault all three landing forces should be under American command. Two American regimental combat teams were to participate in the assault on Algiers and were to try to make the American character of the force as conspicuous to the French as possible; but part of the assault elements and all of the reinforcements afloat, two thirds of the total, were to be British. General Ryder left his headquarters in Northern Ireland as Commanding General, 34th U.S.

[59] On record most emphatically was Admiral Bennett (U.S.) at whose training station at Rosneath, Scotland, the RESERVIST Force got ready for the operation. See NCXF, Report of Proceedings, Operation TORCH, 31 Mar 43, Incl 6 (Miscellaneous Reports of Proceedings), Rpt of Commander U.S. Naval bases, Oran Area, Incl B.

[60] Cominch Secret Despatch 1645, 22 Sep 42, cited in Rpt, Adm Bennett to CinC US Fleet, 30 Nov 42. Div of Naval Hist, File A16–3. It was to be Task Group 26.8, U.S. Atlantic Fleet.

[61] Outline Plan TORCH, 8 Oct 42, Annex 1*a* to Annex 1, 20 Sep 42. OPD 381 TORCH.

Infantry Division, to report on 5 September at Norfolk House as Commanding General, Eastern Assault Force. General Anderson's plans for the drive into Tunisia had to be adapted to the capabilities and requirements of an Allied task force serving at first under another commander. After Algiers had capitulated, Anderson was to relieve Ryder and, as Commanding General, Eastern Task Force, to control the critical operations to seize Tunisia. The shift of command at Algiers was clarified in a conference of Generals Clark, Anderson, and Ryder on 8 September.[62]

Further to preserve the attack's American character, which British intelligence reports had declared to be prudent, General Ryder was authorized to name Brig. Gen. Ray E. Porter (U.S.) as Deputy Commander, Eastern Assault Force.[63] His two American regimental combat teams were the 168th from his own division, recently put under the command of Col. John W. O'Daniel, and the 39th (from the 9th Division), under Col. Benjamin F. Caffey, Jr. The 39th, embarking in the same transports it expected to use in the assault, was shipped from the United States in time to reach the United Kingdom on 7–8 October.[64] All other troops were necessarily furnished from British First Army.

The military problem at Algiers had certain resemblances to that at Oran.[65] The city is on the western shore of the bay of Algiers, which extends for about twelve miles between Pointe Pescade on a broad headland at the west and Cap Matifou, a sharper promontory at the east. (*See Map 3.*) The bay is somewhat deeper than Oran's, but is sheltered by western heights which, although lower, correspond to Djebel Murdjadjo and Djebel Santon, west of Oran. The suburbs of La Bouzaréa and Lambiridi (formerly known as El Biar) occupy the western heights at Algiers. Industrial towns and resort villages line the southern shore of the bay east of Algiers. The headland, cape, and heights along the coast furnish sites for coastal defense batteries, with positions and ranges covering the bay's entire rim. From the crest of the ridges west of the city, the land slopes gradually westward until it reaches a section of the coast between the small communities of Castiglione and Guyotville. The sixteen miles of coast between them trends northeast and southwest and, at Cap Sidi Ferruch, is divided into two unequal portions. A jutting promontory at Cap Sidi Ferruch, four miles west of Guyotville, separates two bays on either side of it. Here in 1830 an expedition of about 37,000 men had once landed as the first step in the French conquest of Algiers, then under a Moslem ruler. A modern fort at Cap Sidi Ferruch was intended to prevent history from repeating itself.

Beyond Cap Matifou and the small village of Jean-Bart at its base, the coast is low and unprotected for many miles past Aïn Taya village to the east-southeast. Directly south of the bay is Maison Carrée, about eight miles from Algiers. It is a commercial town of perhaps 30,000 through which run the main highway and railroad connections with the great port. Husseïn Dey, an industrial suburb almost as large as Maison Carrée is halfway between the two, and Birmandreïs, a smaller residential suburb, is less than five miles directly south of Algiers. South and southwest of the bay of Algiers

[62] CinC AF Diary, 5 Sep, 9 Sep, and 14 Sep 42.
[63] CinC AF Diary, 17 Sep 42.
[64] 39th Inf Hist, 1942.
[65] Terrain and defenses as shown in EAF FO 1, G–2 Annex.

is a ribbon of undulating plain, one of the most fertile sections of Algiers, extending to the foothills of the Atlas Tellien. Of the streams which drain northward from the mountains to the coast, two cross this region to enter the bay of Algiers and two others skirt the outer edges of the headlands bounding the bay. At Husseïn Dey, Maison Blanche, and Blida in November 1942 were airfields which an occupying force must bring under control.

The coastal defense batteries near Algiers, twelve or thirteen in number, were known to be strongest at Pointe Pescade and Cap Matifou and very effectively placed for resistance to landings at Cap Sidi Ferruch or near the port at Algiers. The Batterie du Lazaret near Cap Matifou had a range of more than fourteen miles. Weaker batteries, as well as antiaircraft guns, were sited along the bay, on the heights of the city, and near the airfields. No naval force comparable to that at Casablanca was likely to be found in Algiers harbor, but a few smaller ships could be anticipated.

French combat aircraft in Algeria were estimated to consist of 2 reconnaissance planes, 39 bombers, and 52 fighters, supplemented by 20 transport planes. German bombers from Sardinia could also be expected to intervene, although the distance from their bases would deprive them of fighter escort and leave them without enough fuel for prolonged operations near Algiers. Ground troops in Algeria included the Algiers Division of about 16,000 and the Constantine Division of 13,000, plus the 7th Legion of Guards, 1,500, and an antiaircraft regiment numbering 3,000. An armored force which could muster 6 medium and 60 light tanks, some armored cars, and an uncertain amount of motorized 75-mm. artillery had to be taken into consideration. The main resistance to an approach to Algiers from the east could be expected from a garrison of 1,200 at Maison Carrée and from the armored unit, seven miles southeast of the objective. Coastal defense exercises against surprise night attack were held late in September.[66]

The Eastern Assault Force's plan of attack prescribed three simultaneous landings by major elements, two of them to be west of Algiers and the third, east of Cap Matifou near the village of Aïn Taya.[67] Each landing was to be in the strength of one regimental combat team, that by British troops to be made by the 11th Infantry Brigade Group of the British 78th Division. The two American units were to drive inland and to converge, thus sealing off Algiers from reinforcements, while the third sub-task force protected the western flank and held itself in readiness for commitment either against the city or in securing the airfield at Blida. The 168th Combat Team was to seize coastal defenses west of Algiers, aided by a Commando unit, and press into the city through the suburban heights while the 39th Combat Team was capturing other coastal defenses near Cap Matifou, occupying airfields and the powerful Radio Alger (THA) station,[68] and closing on the city from the east. A floating reserve available for landing on the afternoon of D Day, either to assist in the attack on Algiers or to capture Blida airfield and protect the south flank, would be furnished by the British 36th Infantry Brigade Group. One squadron of the British 56th Reconnaissance Regiment was also scheduled for landing with

[66] Msg, Dyer to Marshall, 26 Sep 42, CM-IN 11647.

[67] Outline Plan TORCH, 8 Oct 42, Annex 3, 11 Oct 42. OPD 381 TORCH.

[68] At Les Eucalyptus.

the 11th Infantry Brigade Group and for subsequent availability in force reserve.

Operation TERMINAL, a direct assault on Algiers harbor by a special force combining British naval with American Army elements, was inserted in the plans in much the same general form and manner as Operation RESERVIST at Oran harbor.[69]

After General Anderson relieved General Ryder on orders from the Allied commander in chief, Ryder's command would be transformed. His American units would be redesignated the 34th Infantry Division and come under General Anderson's command as the Algiers garrison. His British units would revert to the British 78th Division.

These plans for the Eastern Assault Force were completed with persistent concern for the subsequent mission of the Eastern Task Force. General Anderson was responsible for establishing a base in Algiers and then speedily occupying eastern Algeria and Tunisia. He had urged without success that assault landings be made on D Day at Philippeville and Bône. He sought to accomplish some of the same objectives while conforming to the decisions of 5 September by planning to assemble a seaborne assault force from the British units released by General Ryder, and sending it to take the airdrome at Djidjelli and the port of Bougie, escorted by naval units from the Eastern Naval Task Force which could be spared from Algiers. He had hoped to have at sea for early arrival and debarkation at easterly ports most of the troops and matériel with which he expected to penetrate Tunisia. Transport on the scale required to meet his proposals could not be supplied, although the rate of build-up for the Eastern Task Force was greatly to exceed that at Oran.[70]

The capture and employment of the eastern ports—Bougie, Philippeville, and Bône—required air defense by fighter planes from adjacent landing grounds if the losses to enemy bombing attack were to be kept within bearable limits. A British parachute force using American transport aircraft would be in Allied Force reserve and probably be available, as also would be whatever American parachute forces in the Center Task Force were not expended in taking Oran. But whatever commitments of these elements were made to gain control of airfields along the coast would naturally delay airborne attacks at Bizerte and Tunis.

Air support was to be furnished to General Anderson's forces by the Eastern Air Command under Air Marshal Welsh, perhaps reinforced by units from the U.S. Twelfth Air Force. The prospects were well below General Anderson's desires, for the 45,000 British and 10,000 American troops that he would have in the Algiers area by 12 November would be supported by at most five squadrons of fighters, one light bomber squadron, one Army Co-operation squadron, one photographic reconnaissance squadron, and a general long-range reconnaissance squadron for co-operation with the Royal Navy. Service and maintenance units might by 12 November be able to operate at Maison Blanche airfield or even at Blida. The air build-up was expected to

[69] Outline Plan TORCH, 8 Oct 42, Annex 3*a*, 13 Oct 42. OPD 381 TORCH. (2) Provisional Convoy Programme with AFHQ Troop List 2 (Order of Battle), 3 Oct 42. 1942 TORCH Plans UK Col Gay file, Kansas City Rcds Ctr. This list allowed for 116,000 reinforcements to the Eastern Task Force while 58,000 were brought to the Center Task Force up to D plus 33.

[70] CinC AF Diary, 14 Sep, 15 Sep, 17 Sep, and 13 Oct 42.

enlarge this force as rapidly as possible during the remainder of November, but, at the time when the Eastern Task Force might be reaching its objective in Tunisia and under the strongest enemy resistance, the Eastern Air Command would still be much too weak for the needs of full-scale offensive action with the troops. Fighter planes were to be shipped in crates to Gibraltar and assembled at the airdrome there. Ground units were to be brought by sea in order that air transports might be available to the paratroop units to the fullest possible extent.[71]

The Eastern Air Command was intended to reach, in seven weeks, a total of 454 aircraft, in twenty-five and one-third squadrons, more than half of which would be short-range fighters, 43 would be general reconnaissance planes, and less than 100 would be bombers of all types.[72] Eastern Air Command headquarters was to be in Algiers.

Plans for the Eastern Task Force were made in alternative forms since French resistance or French acceptance of the advance might so gravely affect the rate of eastward movement. If the French resisted, a methodical overland advance was expected to yield the capture of Bône in about three weeks. If the French either passively or actively aided the march, the Eastern Task Force would push boldly along the coast, with parachute drops at Bône, Bizerte, and Tunis on successive days, commencing on D plus 3.[73]

[71] Outline Plan TORCH, 8 Oct 42, Annex 1*c* to Annex 2 of Annex 1 (Air Outline Plan TORCH), 20 Sep 42. OPD 381 TORCH.

[72] Outline Plan TORCH, 8 Oct 42, Annex 1*a* to Annex 1, 20 Sep 42. OPD 381 TORCH.

[73] Outline Plan TORCH, 8 Oct 42, Annex 4, 28 Oct 42. OPD 381 TORCH.

Political Preparations

Tactical plans for the occupation of each of the major objectives were founded on the knowledge that the size and equipment of all French military forces had been severely restricted by Axis limitations, and in the hope that actual resistance might be minimized by political activity. Indeed, an underlying objective of the whole operation was to promote conditions which would bring the French back into the war on the side of the Allies. To effect a purely nominal resistance to the landings, followed by association in arms against the Axis powers, was the purpose both of Allied representatives in French North Africa and of pro-Allied Frenchmen (in the armed services, civil administration, or private life) who were enrolled in secret organizations. The Allied agents worked in French North Africa under instructions from AFHQ.

A special staff section at AFHQ was created in August to furnish political information to General Eisenhower and to draft plans applicable to political aspects of the undertaking. Many of these problems had been anticipated by the British. The chief of this Political Affairs Section, Mr. W. H. B. Mack (Br.), was transferred to that position from the British Foreign Office. His first instructions were actually signed by Anthony Eden, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Mr. Mack's administrative task with reference to Operation TORCH was to co-ordinate five agencies, four British and one American: the Special Operations Executive, Political Warfare Executive, Secret Intelligence Service, Ministry of Information, and Office of the Coordinator of Information (later, the Office of

Strategic Services).[74] A draft plan for political warfare was submitted to General Gruenther, Deputy Chief of Staff, Allied Force.[75] It sketched elaborate preparations for propaganda, for the terms of possible armistices between each of the task forces and the local French commanders, for the conduct of civil affairs following the termination of hostilities, and for the ultimate status of the French colonies and of the government at Vichy. This tentative plan was considered in trying to arrive at an outline plan for the entire operation which would be likely to succeed.

Mr. Robert Murphy served in North Africa as the chief diplomatic representative of the United States before the decision in July 1942 to send an Allied expedition there. It was well understood by General Marshall that the President would assume personal direction of political activities, but it was expected also that he would so manage them that General Eisenhower, as the Allied commander in chief, was kept fully aware of all details and in immediate control. General Eisenhower believed that "subversive activities, propaganda, and political warfare had to be carefully and completely co-ordinated with military plans if they were to avoid being not only inappropriate but also a positive menace." In furtherance of this aim Murphy was designated to become a member of his staff, to take up the position when the Allied Force arrived in French North Africa. Before that time, he acted less as a staff than as a line officer in his leadership of the political negotiations and preparations from Casablanca to Algiers.[76]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff assigned control over all the American agencies concerned with undercover preparation for TORCH in North Africa and Spain to the Allied commander in chief. The British agencies were brought into co-ordination with the American by putting them all under the supervision of G–3 at AFHQ. Colonel Eddy (U.S. Marine Corps) directed them from Tangier and Col. Brien Clarke (Br.), acting as his deputy, directed them from Gibraltar. Murphy was empowered to control the schedule and order any necessary modifications of secret operations, and even to direct them in Algeria and Tunisia should that become expedient.[77]

Murphy flew to Washington from Algiers early in September for conferences with the President, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and officials of the Department of State. He presented his own estimates of the prospective operation's political aspects and reported that a reputable military group in Algiers recommended Allied association with Gen. Henri Giraud as a French leader. He then learned from the President that a final decision to occupy French North Africa had actually been reached.[78]

Murphy then went to London bringing a draft directive from the President for General Eisenhower to review, and voluminous data for the Allied military leadership

[74] (1) Dir, Eden to Mack, 15 Aug 42; Ltr, Mack to Eden, 19 Aug 42. Copies in OPD ABC 381 TORCH, Sec 1. (2) Msg 1381, London to AGWAR, 21 Aug 42, CM-IN 8420. ETOUSA Outgoing Cables, Kansas City Rcds Ctr. (3) Ltr to All Concerned, 15 Sep 42. AFHQ 330, 31–5.

[75] Ltr, Eisenhower to Clark, 16 Aug 42; Ltrs, Mack to Gruenther, 20 Aug and 23 Aug 42; Memo, Political Warfare Executive Policy in the Light of TORCH. AFHQ AG 336–97, Micro Job 24, Reel 78D.

[76] Telg, London to AGWAR, 7 Aug 42, CM-IN 2389 (paraphrase).

[77] (1) Telgs, London to AGWAR, 7 Sep 42, CM-IN 3151, 22 Sep 42, CM-IN 9484, 26 Sep 42, CM-IN 11538, and 16 Oct 42, CM-IN 6797. (2) Hist of AFHQ, Pt. 1, pp. 84–86. (3) Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, pp. 307–16.

[78] Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, p. 311, prints Murphy's Memorandum.

to consider. Disguised as "Lt. Col. McGowan," and traveling by air without revealing his identity to fellow passengers, he then spent almost twenty-four hours at General Eisenhower's rural cottage near London. His grasp of matters of military significance and his evident judgment and discretion gained General Eisenhower's "utmost confidence." He satisfied both American and British members of Eisenhower's group that their plans were well founded and that he could serve them without breaking the tight barriers of security. The topics under discussion ranged widely. Murphy learned that the size of the projected expedition would closely approximate that which the French in North Africa had estimated would be necessary. He indicated the civilian and military co-operation which could be expected. The conference reviewed the problem of how long an interval should elapse between notification of the friendly French and actual Allied landings, the risk of losing surprise being balanced against the necessity for enough time secretly to mobilize the fifth columnists.

The draft directive from the President to Murphy under which he was to return to Algiers as the President's personal representative authorized him to give at least a twenty-four-hour notice to reliable friends and to identify for them the approximate landing beaches. Although more than a twenty-four-hour notice would be needed, he was persuaded by General Eisenhower that no French leader should be notified until D Day was imminent. On the theme of the supreme command over inter-Allied forces in French North Africa, a post which, Murphy reported, General Giraud's adherents in Africa clearly expected him to hold, General Eisenhower foreshadowed the position he later took in direct discussion with General Giraud—the French forces must first be rearmed by the Allies and in condition to defend Northwest Africa successfully before the Allies could consider permitting them to exercise supreme command there. French forces could remain under French command, but would have to co-operate fully with an Allied supreme commander.[79]

The President's draft directive to Murphy specified that no change in the civil administration of each of the three territories of French North Africa was contemplated. The Allied leaders intended to leave the non-co-operating French there to the mercies of the friendly French, while preventing acts of private vengeance. Although de Gaulle might be bypassed in Operation TORCH, he would have an essential role in connection with the cross-Channel attack, and the Allied commander in chief expressed strong interest in including de Gaulle in planning for that operation as soon as possible.[80]

These conferences with Murphy in Washington, Hyde Park (New York), and London consolidated the broad planning for activities involving the friendly French. The precise secret operations ashore which were to facilitate the landings were determined in separate conferences in London and Washington until instructions from the Commander in Chief, Allied Force, to Colonel Eddy were issued on 14 October.[81] The

[79] Butcher, *My Three Years With Eisenhower*, p. 108.

[80] Min, Discussion with Mr. Murphy. AFHQ AG 336–97, Micro Reel 78D, Job 24. The minutes were kept by Col. Julius Holmes.

[81] (1) Ltr, Gen Lemnitzer to Commodore Douglas–Pennant *et al.*, 8 Sep 42. AFHQ Micro Job 24, Reel 136D. (2) Memo, ACofS G–3 AFHQ for CofS's of ETF, EAF, CTF, and WTF, 24 Sep 42, sub: SOE/OSS. Copy in 1942 TORCH Plans UK Col Gay file, Kansas City Rcds Ctr. (3) Secret Opns Instrucs to Col Eddy, 14 Oct 42. AFHQ Micro Job 24, Reel 81D.

instructions provided alternative programs of sabotage and subversive action near the main objectives of each of the task forces, one program in case of resistance by the French armed forces and a second in case of their acquiescence. These programs involved either destructive sabotage or close control over communications and transportation, neutralization of coast defenses, immobilization of ships and submarines in port, sending up signal flares and supplying guides for the Allies, and other such activity.

Careful attention was given to the preparation of written material in furtherance of political and propaganda aims. These documents included a set of formal communications, prepared partly in London and partly in Washington, from the President to the rulers and chiefs of government of Portugal, Spain, Vichy France, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Proclamations were formulated, both in French and in Arabic, to be issued in the name of the President or of the commander in chief. Propaganda leaflets were prepared to be dropped from airplanes. Radio technicians and broadcasting teams were brought to the United Kingdom from the United States to accompany the Center Task Force. Other field units were organized to produce and distribute leaflets and to work with local newspapers.[82]

Civil Affairs Planning

Most of the political preparations thus far described were concerned with minimizing armed resistance to the occupying forces and with obtaining active co-operation from the French in driving the Axis from northern Africa. But other arrangements looked to the maintenance of security in the rear areas after the Allies were established ashore, when French North Africa would become a base for further operations. The Civil Affairs Section of AFHQ under Mr. H. Freeman Matthews (U.S.) formulated the requisite plans to prepare for such responsibilities.

The Allies had no political course in mind other than to win campaigns in the field while allowing the French to work out their own internal problems, unhampered and unaided. This policy was avowed by the President and set forth as approved military doctrine.[83] They allowed for two contrasting contingencies. A friendly reception from the French would warrant one set of arrangements; strong opposition, followed by conditions which necessitated stringent military control, would justify another. The planners therefore prepared armistice terms for use by the task force commanders to fit either situation, and also devised two alternative series of proclamations and ordinances.[84] The fundamental purpose was to avoid any interference with the population except what was inescapable and necessary to assist military operations. The basic method would be to supervise the operation of existing civil agencies by the French. The past political sympathies of officeholders were to be treated as of small significance compared with their ability to discharge the technical duties of their respective positions.

Foreign exchange transactions and the use of bank accounts were to be subject to

[82] (1) Msgs: USFOR to AGWAR, 6 Nov 42, CM-IN 2625; AGWAR to USFOR, 15 Oct 42, CM-OUT 04949; USFOR to AGWAR, 13 Oct 42, CM-IN 05515. (2) Msg, Murphy to Hull for Eisenhower, 30 Oct 42. Copy in WDCSA 381 Torch Sec 2.

[83] Albert K. Weinberg and Harry L. Coles, Jr., Soldiers Become Governors, a volume in preparation for the series UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II.

[84] (1) CCS 103/9, 16 Oct 42. (2) CCS 44th Mtg, Supp Notes.

licenses which a task force commander might grant or withhold. Taxes were to be collected in the normal ways, but those formerly devoted to the national government were to be applied to meet any expenses of military government.

Large expenditures would be made by the invading forces within French North Africa for labor and rentals, as well as for the payment of the troops. Damage claims by individual proprietors could be expected. The currency to be used by the Allied Force was the subject of careful study and discussion. It was not possible to obtain in advance adequate amounts of the local currencies of the three French colonies without forfeiting surprise. Insufficient amounts were therefore to be supplemented by special invasion currencies, American and British, to be used prior to a negotiated agreement with the local government and bank of issue at rates of exchange somewhat more favorable to the franc than in the free market in October 1942. These provisional rates were 75 francs to the dollar, 300 francs to the pound sterling.[85]

Agreements reached after the invasion could provide for the use in specific areas of local franc currencies issued against dollar credits in the United States. Local currencies were to be obtained from local banks, being printed if necessary in the United States and furnished to those banks for issue. The rates of exchange would be fixed in the agreements.[86] Finance officers were commissioned directly from civilian positions which equipped them for their military roles. The Treasury, War, and State Departments cooperated in preparing for the currency problems.[87]

Control over importation of civilian necessities such as cotton goods, tea, and sugar, in great demand by the Arabs, and coal, gasoline, kerosene, candles, and soap, items wanted mainly by other groups, was recognized as an instrument of political influence. It was deemed prudent to relate the distribution of consumers' goods to employment in the service of the Allies, making it possible for the natives to convert their labor at the ports and along the lines of supply into possession of scarce and highly desired commodities.[88]

Plans applicable to civil affairs were completed in time for issue in AFHQ General Orders on 11, 12, and 21 October.[89] Arrangements were also made for the inclusion in each task force of a civilian deputy civil administrator, a military assistant civil administrator, and a section of some seven additional specialists. At AFHQ, the Political Affairs Section under Mr. Mack and the Civil Affairs Section under Mr. Matthews were combined into one section to be headed by the latter until Robert Murphy could assume his position as chief civil administrator and political adviser of the commander in chief. The Propaganda Operations subsection and the Psychological Analysis and Planning subsection, headed by members of the Office of War Information and Office of Strategic Services respectively, were to be supervised by Col. Julius

[85] Msg 1498, USFOR to AGWAR, 25 Aug 42, CM-IN 9685; Msg 2417, USFOR to AGWAR, 19 Sep 42; Msg R-1576, AGWAR to USFOR, 5 Oct 42, CM-OUT 1597; Msg R-2395, AGWAR to USFOR, 24 Oct 42, CM-OUT 8579. ETOUSA Outgoing and Incoming Cables, Kansas City Rcds Ctr.

[86] Msg R-1735, AGWAR to USFOR, 9 Oct 42, CM-OUT 02966. ETOUSA Incoming Cables, Kansas City Rcds Ctr.

[87] Msg R-1844, AGWAR to USFOR, 12 Oct 42, CM-OUT 03901. ETOUSA Incoming Cables, Kansas City Rcds Ctr.

[88] JCS 136. Copy in OPD 381 (7-25-42) Sec 3.

[89] AFHQ GO's 4 (11 Oct 42), 5 (12 Oct 42), and 8 (21 Oct 42).

Holmes in G–1, while the special operations sections of the Office of Strategic Services (U.S.) and the Special Operation Executive (Br.) Section would remain under G–3 for co-ordination with other activities.[90]

Thus in most respects, the strategic decisions, tactical plans, and political preparations took form early in October, with the interval before the prospective departure of the assault convoys narrowing to a matter of days.

[90] Msg R–1901, WD to CG ETOUSA, 13 Oct 42, CM-OUT 04257; Msg 3633, London to AGWAR, 15 Oct 42, CM-IN 6797. ETOUSA Incoming and Outgoing Cables, Kansas City Reds Ctr.

CHAPTER IV

Completing the Preparations

The pace of preparations for Operation TORCH accelerated in October, when decisions already made at higher levels had their greatest effect on those engaged in training troops, loading convoys, and arranging for reinforcement and subsequent logistical support. A dramatic change was impending in the Mediterranean theater of war. The carefully prepared offensive of the British Eighth Army in Egypt was scheduled to begin on 23 October in the hope that a victory over Field Marshal Rommel's forces would be clearly won a few days before the Allied landings in French North Africa. While the convoys were putting out to sea, decisive negotiations linked the Allied Force with elements of the French armed forces there. These matters were the major aspects of the last period of planning, preparation, and overseas approach to the objective.

Training for the Assault

Although under his Army directive all training of the Western Task Force was General Patton's responsibility as its commander, his units were actually to be trained in the methods of amphibious warfare while assigned to the Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet. Rear Adm. Henry Kent Hewitt assumed command of that new agency on 28 April, about six weeks after its activation under the direction of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He had an Army section in his force headquarters, an Army as well as a Navy chief of staff, and parallel staff sections under each, organized in conformity with Army practice. He was eventually to have warships, transports, and troops in a forward echelon for overseas operations, while a rear echelon gave logistical support and continued training and intelligence activities whenever the forward echelon was at sea. A training center which took form during the summer and autumn of 1942 in the Norfolk area included schools for commanders and staffs, and for the various specialists that had been found indispensable to successful amphibious operations. There, under instructors from both the Army and Navy, men were trained to serve as transport quartermasters, as members of shore fire control parties, as members of shore and beach parties, as boat wave commanders, boat operating crews, or amphibious scouts or raiders.[1]

The complex requirements of successful landings on hostile shores had for several years been studied in a series of exercises employing elements of the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Army. Joint training forces, uniting the 1st Infantry Division with the 1st Marine Division on the Atlantic coast and the 3d Infantry Division with the 2d Marine Division on the Pacific coast,

[1] Intervs with Adm Hewitt, 23 Jan 51, and Adm Mitchell, 13 May 50. (2) Info from Hewitt File, OPD TF "A" Rcds. (3) Memo, Comdr Amph Force Atlantic Fleet for CinC US Fleet, 21 Oct 42, sub: Program for amph tng. Copy in OPD Exec 10, Item 67*b*.

provided in 1941 some advanced training for units of two Army divisions which were later to participate in Operation TORCH. An elaborate full-scale exercise at New River, North Carolina, with air and naval support had been planned for December 1941. The U-boat menace caused it to be abruptly transferred to the southern shores of Chesapeake Bay, where the many deficiencies revealed by the exercise made apparent the necessity of improved and amplified training. The 9th Infantry Division began amphibious training early in 1942, taking the place formerly held by the 1st Infantry Division, which soon afterward moved to the United Kingdom.[2]

One of the weaknesses shown in various exercises in 1941 was the inability of the shore and beach parties to unload landing craft swiftly; as long as these boats were unable to retract through the surf for a return trip to a transport, they blocked access to the beach for subsequent boat waves. The Navy tentatively assigned responsibility for unloading to elements of the landing force rather than to teams formed from ships' personnel, for the latter were needed for duties afloat. The Marine Corps inserted a Pioneer Battalion in its divisions to unload boats, and the Army seems to have accepted the responsibility in principle, but to have delayed making sufficient provision in its shore parties for actual performance of the task.[3]

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1942 the troops of the Western Task Force completed unit training. The 3d Infantry Division remained on the west coast until just before the final phase, while the 9th Infantry and 2d Armored Division's elements, with supporting units, trained at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and elsewhere on the east coast. Amphibious training was to reach its climax in a rehearsal in Chesapeake Bay from the very transports, partly loaded, on which the landing teams would be conveyed to Morocco. The 3d Infantry Division arrived at Camp Pickett, Virginia, in mid-September, a few days before this rehearsal began.[4]

The troops received insufficient training in air-ground co-operation, for the U.S. Army Air Forces, in the midst of a Herculean effort to expand swiftly, could not spare enough aircraft and personnel for effective training with ground troops. Moreover, the Air Forces differed from the Ground Forces in their conception of proper battlefield support and were disposed to concentrate heavily on strategic bombing.[5]

Sub-task force commanders prepared schemes of maneuver for forces limited by the maximum transport which could be alloted to them, assigning tasks to elements of their commands in a manner which will be described later.[6] Training exercises simulated the actual conditions likely to be met ashore. The program of training in the fall of 1942 was hampered by incessant withdrawal of men for assignment to officer candidate schools or to cadres of new Army units. Successive replacements filled out the units with men whose training was necessarily very uneven. The period of planning

[2] See Capt Marshall O. Becker, The Amphibious Training Center, Hist Sec AGF Study 22, 1946, pp. 1–17.

[3] JCS, Special Monograph on Amphibious Warfare, p. 86.

[4] Donald G. Taggart, ed., *History of the Third Infantry Division in World War II* (Washington, 1947), pp. 7–8.

[5] Col. Kent Roberts Greenfield, *Army Ground Forces and the Air-Ground Battle Team, Including Organic Light Aviation*, AGF Hist Sec, Study 35, 1948, pp. 20–21.

[6] See below, Chapters VI–VIII.

and preparations came to a close in the latter part of October in an atmosphere of unrelieved improvisation and haste, an unavoidable consequence of the determination to undertake an operation which stretched resources to the limit.

The Center and Eastern Task Forces were trained and rehearsed in ship-to-shore landings at various points in the United Kingdom. The 39th Regimental Combat Team (RCT) was shipped, partly trained, from the United States to reach the United Kingdom on 7–8 October. It had received a considerable amount of battalion and a little regimental ship-to-shore training. Its transports were combat loaded, carried sixty days' supplies and ten units of fire for all weapons,[7] and vehicles which, unfortunately, had to be waterproofed and restowed after reaching the United Kingdom in order to be in the correct tactical order for a night landing. After the voyage the troops spent a few days ashore getting reconditioned and then participated in a rehearsal exercise starting on 17 October from Tail of the Bank, River Clyde.[8]

The 168th RCT, from the 34th Infantry Division, had come overseas with normal equipment and maintenance, but depended upon stocks in the United Kingdom for signal, engineer, ordnance, and quartermaster supplies and for ammunition.

The 1st Engineer Amphibian Brigade (Col. Henry C. Wolfe, commanding) arrived in the Glasgow area on 17 August 1942 after a headlong embarkation on very short notice, and a voyage of eleven days. The unit was expected, at the time of its departure, to complete training with the 1st Infantry Division in the United Kingdom and to provide the additional specialized units necessary for the Division's assault landing operations. While it was at sea, a revised Army-Navy agreement concerning landing craft crews and amphibious training went into effect. The brigade was broken up soon after its arrival. The advance headquarters of the U.S. Navy, Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet, was then being established at Rosneath, under Admiral Bennett. Colonel Wolfe was assigned to the admiral's staff and made responsible for shore party training.[9]

Not far from Rosneath, at Inverary, was the Combined Operations Training Center (British), at the time greatly hampered by the lack of adequate boat maintenance facilities. The 561st Boat Maintenance Company, fully and freshly provided with the requisite equipment, salvaged over 100 landing craft at Inverary. At Toward, the beaches were better for practice exercises than those at Rosneath or Inverary, but the camp site was unsatisfactory. At all three places deepwater anchorages permitted the instruction of troops in combat loading and disembarkation from ships to small boats. A fourth site, at Gales, some forty-five miles southwest of Glasgow near Irvine, was better in all respects save its exposure to southwest winds, which on occasion forced the suspension of all small-boat operations. But at the rocky beaches of the four training sites, the small boats had to approach the shore with caution to avoid broaching, instead of moving rapidly as if under fire.[10]

[7] The unit of fire (U/F) is a standardized quantity of ammunition for each weapon in service, varying for each type of weapon and, during World War II, in each theater of operation.

[8] (1) 39th Inf Hist, 1942. (2) AFHQ Memo 1, 5 Oct 42.

[9] Heavey, *Down Ramp*, Ch. III.

[10] Memo, Brig Gen Daniel Noce for Clark, 26 Sep 42, sub: Obsn at amph tng ctrs in Scotland. AFHQ AG 350.07–15, Micro Job 24, Reel 79D.

The training schedule in the United Kingdom for the Center Task Force assault units was arranged on 25 August 1942, at a meeting between General Clark (U.S.), General Anderson (Br.), Commodore John Hughes-Hallett (Br.), and Maj. Gen. J. C. Haydon (Br.). It was settled that from 31 August to 12 September, one RCT of the 34th Division and a detachment from an RCT of the 1st Division would train at Inverary, to be followed by an RCT of the 1st Division from 14 to 26 September. The next two weeks were allotted to ship loadings. From 8 to 18 October, rehearsals and the topping off of ships would occur. At Rosneath and Toward facilities would then be available also for boat training of a second RCT from the 1st Division, but no ships could be provided. From 22 September to 5 October, the craft used during training were to be put in condition for the operation itself.[11]

The 16th RCT held landing exercises at Inverchaolain Peninsula (near Dunoon) during the night of 27–28 September, while the 26th RCT engaged in a second such practice operation at Inverary about twenty-four hours later. The 18th RCT and 168th RCT had left these stations about a week earlier, and were completing their training in new areas at that time.[12] Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, trained in Northern Ireland while the other amphibious assault elements were in Scotland, and while much of the staff were engaged in planning and preparations in London.

The British First Army was activated on 6 July 1942 around the elements of an expeditionary force which had been training in western Scotland for several months. It consisted, at its inception, of 5 Corps (4th and 78th Divisions), 6th Armoured Division, and 22d Antiaircraft Artillery Brigade. During the first week of August, the requirements for staging and executing a large-scale amphibious landing against opposition had been tested by the British First Army in Exercise DRYSHOD. The tests indicated that the 78th Division, from which troops for the Eastern Assault Force were to be drawn, like the boat crews of the British transports, was then capable of only the sort of weakly resisted operation anticipated near Algiers. The 11th and 36th Brigade Groups and two Commando units (partly manned by volunteers from the U.S. 34th Infantry Division) were scheduled to engage in the amphibious assault.

Training for the amphibious operations in French North Africa, and in some respects for the subsequent phase of TORCH, fell short of what was desired and perhaps below the requirements of victory over a well-armed and determined foe. Whatever misgivings those preparing the expeditionary forces in the United States and the United Kingdom may have felt, they were attempting to do the best thing possible within the limitations imposed by inexperience, uncertainty, and shortness of time, rather than trying to turn out a force completely ready.

Plans for Logistical Support

The logistical planning for Operation TORCH was designed to support an American troop basis of seven divisions, with two more in reserve, and a tenth perhaps avail-

[11] (1) Ltrs, Adm Mountbatten to Gen Clark, Gen Anderson, and Vice Adm Bertram H. Ramsay, 25 Aug 42. AFHQ Micro Job 24, Reel 136D. (2) Msg, Clark to Anderson, 22 Sep 42. AFHQ Micro Job 24, Reel 79D.

[12] Ltr, Col S. E. Biddle to Gen Clark, 23 Sep 42. AFHQ Micro Job 24, Reel 136D. This outlines Clark's itinerary for an inspection trip.







U. S. RANGERS TRAINING IN SCOTLAND. *Top left, men are crossing the rope bridge over exploding mines.*

able if the military situation elsewhere permitted, plus a British "war establishment" of four divisions, with part of an airborne and a whole small Royal Marine division in force reserve.[13] Two British divisions which were at first included in the schedule for Operation TORCH were retained for the defense of the British Isles, but subject to employment in a special Northern Task Force (Lt. Gen. Frederick E. Morgan, commanding) to gain full control of the southern shores at the Strait of Gibraltar if Spain became hostile to the Allies.[14] The initial and early following convoys were expected to bring to Northwest Africa within one month a total of over 200,000 American ground troops, including the ground echelons of Army Air Forces units, and a somewhat smaller total of British troops.[15] (*Appendix A*) Large increments were to be brought during the next four months.

In view of the Allied character of the expeditionary force, a clear division of supply responsibility was sought.[16] The supplies for the force in the Algiers area, whether British or American, were to be transported from the United Kingdom in British shipping. Those items normally issued to United States but not to British forces were to be transferred in the United Kingdom by Services of Supply (SOS), ETOUSA, for delivery by the British First Army to American elements of the Eastern Task Force and of AFHQ. Necessary supplies not normally issued to American personnel would be provided by the British.[17] Matériel from the United States required by American forces in the Oran and Algiers areas in the early phase of the operation was estimated at 260,000 ship tons by D plus 5, 84,000 more by D plus 26, and on the latter date also, 11,000 tons of petrol, oil, and lubricants by tankers.[18]

Some items to fill out shortages went by the "first available shipping from the New York Port of Embarkation to the United Kingdom, but supplies in other categories crossed in more than twenty-five complete and balanced shiploads to the United Kingdom, to be convoyed to North Africa without being unloaded.[19]

The levels of supply in North Africa proposed by AFHQ were fourteen days' for the total force on D plus 30, thirty days' for the total force on D plus 60, and forty-five days' for the total force on D plus 90 and thereafter, with ammunition reserves held at

[13] Msgs: USFOR to AGWAR, 18 Sep 42, CM-IN 7817; AGWAR to USFOR, 4 Oct 42, CM-OUT 1424, and 5 Oct 42, CM-OUT 1602.

[14] Ltr, CinC AF to Gen Ismay, 11 Oct 42. AFHQ AG 381.95, Micro Job 24, Reel 81D.

[15] Actual totals in round figures: U.S. troops from the United States, 65,600 and from the United Kingdom, 105,000; British troops from the United Kingdom, 144,000. Control Div US Trans Corps, Monthly Progress Rpt, 31 May 43. OCT HB.

[16] General Eisenhower requested an over-all directive from Combined Chiefs in a telegram (CM-IN 3664), 9 October 1942. As prepared by the Combined Staff Planners, the directive was CCS/10, 19 October 1942.

[17] This arrangement meant that Class I (rations), Class III (petrol, oil, and lubricants), and most of Class IV (heavy engineering materials) were to be of British issue; the rest of Class IV, Class II (clothing, weapons, vehicles), and Class V (ammunition of all kinds) would be American supplies. Memo, Col George A. Lincoln for CofS SOS ETOUSA, 7 Nov 42, sub: Sum of supply problem for TORCH. Kansas City Rcds Ctr, Env 27, X-14567.

[18] Memo, Col Carter B. Magruder for Brig Gen John E. Hull, 18 Sep 42, sub: Shipments from US for Eastern Force; Memo, Magruder for Brig Gen LeRoy Lutes, 18 Sep 42, same sub; Memo, Hull for Maj Gen Thomas T. Handy, 20 Sep 42, sub: Mvmt of supplies for spec opn. OPD Exec 5, Bk. 3.

[19] Memo, Lutes for ACofS OPD (Attn: Gen Hull), 15 Sep 42, sub: Mvmt of supplies for spec opns. Copy in OPD Exec 5, Bk. 3.

twelve units of fire.[20] A supplementary reserve in the United Kingdom on which to draw was proposed in the event of shipping losses in the convoys from the United States or of other emergencies, to consist of sixty days' supplies and three units of fire.[21] To reach quickly a moderate reserve level in North Africa of forty-five days' supplies would, it was discovered, require a shift to the Center and Eastern Task Forces of some sixteen cargoes previously planned for the Western Task Force. It would also compel either a limitation of the Western Task Force to a total strength of 100,000 men on D plus 90, or, if more men were transported, then a reduction in the tonnage for transporting organizational and maintenance equipment to one-half of the normal allowances.[22]

Command decisions made by General Clark on 28 September in Washington, in a conference with General Patton, Brig. Gen. Arthur R. Wilson, and Brig. Gen. LeRoy Lutes, fixed the level of supplies for the Western Task Force at forty-five days and ten units of fire, and cut the organic equipment to 50 percent of the normal ship tonnage required. The Western Task Force was to be short of equipment, particularly of vehicles, and of service troops for at least three months in order to meet even more pressing requirements. The supply convoys might reduce this interval only by being enlarged to more than forty-five ships, once North African port facilities permitted.

Each task force was to organize its own service of supply, including base sections to become operative in the ports as soon after the assault as proved feasible. After the 5 September decision, General Wilson was named to command SOS, Western Task Force, and eventually, the Atlantic Base Section at Casablanca. Brig. Gen. Thomas B. Larkin of SOS, ETOUSA, was to take command of SOS, Center Task Force, and later, the Mediterranean Base Section at Oran. It was expected that these two bases would soon come directly under AFHQ, and that after the merger of the two task forces the two SOS headquarters would be reorganized. In the United States, General Patton planned to leave behind a rear echelon of the Provisional Corps Headquarters, Task Force "A," commanded by Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy, to supervise the shipment of troops in accordance with the plans for reinforcements and replacements devised before the Western Task Force departed.[23]

Late in the period of planning and preparation, the SOS, War Department, after operating under a series of specific agreements between General Eisenhower's headquarters and agencies in the War Department concerning supply, requested from AFHQ a "complete plan." [24] A draft of such a plan, furnished on 27 October 1942, remained the subject of discussion for several more weeks.[25]

The task forces could not establish adequate inventory controls and requisitioning

[20] The unit of fire in the Western Task Force is given in WTF Memo 44, 18 Dec 42. AFHQ G–3 Ops 77/1, Micro Job 10A, Reel 23C.

[21] Telg, USFOR to AGWAR, 27 Oct 42, CM-IN 11595.

[22] Memo, Brig Gen LeRoy Lutes for Gen Clark, 28 Sep 42, sub: Maint of US troops in CTF and ETF. OPD Exec 5, Item 2*a*.

[23] General Eddy, Commanding General, 9th Infantry Division, had had his division split up, Combat Team 39 going to General Ryder's Eastern Assault Force, Combat Team 47 to General Harmon's Force BLACKSTONE, and Combat Team 60 to General Truscott's Force GOALPOST.

[24] Telg, AGWAR to USFOR, 18 Oct 42, CM-OUT 5858.

[25] Telg, USFOR to AGWAR, 27 Oct 42, CM-IN 11595.

procedures until the base sections should become operative. For the first two months, automatic supply of Class II, IV, and V items was planned in conformity with estimates reached by the chiefs of services or the SOS, War Department. Limited requisition was then to begin. The ports of embarkation, under the standard program for the supply of overseas departments, theaters, and bases adopted by the SOS, War Department, were established as the agencies for controlling the outward flow of supplies.

Almost one month after the Operation TORCH began, on 4 December, the approved supply plan for TORCH, was announced.[26] The Western Task Force was to be supplied directly from the United States on requisitions sent to the New York Port of Embarkation, copies of which would be sent to ETOUSA via AFHQ. The Center Task Force was to be supplied directly from the New York Port of Embarkation, except for supplementary cargoes at the rate of some five ships per month which would go via the United Kingdom, but its requisitions would be routed through AFHQ and SOS, ETOUSA, to the Overseas Supply Division, New York Port of Embarkation. A ninety days' level of reserve supplies in North Africa was accepted as a goal. The level in the United Kingdom was set at thirty days of Class I and Class II, and of grease and oil in cans and drums, and two units of fire, but no reserve of Class IV supplies in general. Requisitions might be submitted for a reserve of particular items.[27] In these terms the supply plan was settled without permitting the overseas theater organization either to control directly the maintenance of all American contingents of the Allied Force or to operate on too slender a margin of security. Yet the painful pressure of logistical requirements was apparent in the long period allowed for build-up. Faced with choices between men and matériel, and in turn between various kinds of matériel, the planners arrived at compromises and adjustments determined by their expectations concerning the nature of the forthcoming operation.[28]

Departure of the Western Task Force

Except for the seatrain *New Jersey*, which took on the 39th Combat Team at the New York Port of Embarkation, all combat-loaded ships from the United States departed from the Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation. An admirable plan provided for loading the transports there in two flights, the second taking on cargo and troops while the first went up the Chesapeake on its rehearsal of ship-to-shore debarkation, each troop unit on the transport which would convey it to the hostile shore. The second group would then have its rehearsal while the first ships were being

[26] Memo, CinC AF for TAG, 4 Dec 43, sub: Supply plan for US forces in TORCH.

[27] This exposition is adapted from others officially prepared for use at AFHQ shortly before D Day.

[28] For logistical planning, see: (1) History of the Planning Division, ASF, 1, 87. OCMH. (2) Telgs, USFOR to AGWAR: 3 Sep 42, CM-IN 2030; 7 Sep, CM-IN 2710; 8 Sep, CM-IN 3628; 13 Sep, CM-IN 5609; 13 Sep, CM-IN 5696; 19 Sep, CM-IN 8511; 22 Sep, CM-IN 10047; 23 Sep, CM-IN 10100; 29 Sep, CM-IN 13002; 1 Oct, CM-IN 0070; 5 Oct, CM-IN 2511; 13 Oct, CM-IN 6411; 22 Oct, CM-IN 10052; and 27 Oct, CM-IN 11595. Telgs, AGWAR to USFOR: 17 Sep 42, CM-OUT 5915; 17 Sep, CM-OUT 6033; 20 Sep, CM-OUT 6961; 22 Sep, CM-OUT 7558; 26 Sep, CM-OUT 8823; 26 Sep, CM-OUT 8824; 29 Sep. CM-OUT 9579; 6 Oct, CM-OUT 1763; 10 Oct, CM-OUT 4510; 18 Oct, CM-OUT 5858; 21 Oct, CM-OUT 6877; 29 Oct, CM-OUT 9871; and 6 Nov, CM-OUT 1882. These messages are representative rather than complete.

topped off. This plan could only be approximated, for the Hamptons Roads Port of Embarkation was not yet the experienced organization which it later became, nor had it then the benefit of a completed staging area or of a holding and reconsignment point system to facilitate the orderliness of such a large and complex loading operation. Adjustments and improvisations had to be continuous. The transport *Harry C. Lee,* for example, came back from the landing rehearsal with engine trouble which could not be repaired in time for its departure with the assault convoy. What had previously taken several days to load for combat requirements had therefore to be taken out and laboriously restowed in the *Calvert.* Despite fresh paint and the change of crews, the task was completed in thirty-five hours and the ship joined the main convoy at sea. The *Contessa* provided an agitated postscript, for she appeared at Norfolk as the convoy was about to sail and in a leaking condition which required that she be drydocked. Many of her crew left town while repairs expected to take several days were begun. Extraordinary measures got the *Contessa* afloat, loaded her with gasoline and ammunition, and filled out her crew in time to sail without escort toward Mehdia–Port-Lyautey. Despite these and other deviations from the loading program, the Western Naval Task Force was ready for departure on 23–24 October 1942.[29]

Admiral Hewitt's command consisted of five major divisions: the Covering Group (Task Group 34.1), the Air Group (Task Group 34.2), and the Southern, Center, and Northern Attack Groups (Task Groups 10, 9, and 8). Rear Adm. Robert C. Giffen's Covering Group of seven warships and a tanker was intended to furnish a protective barrier between the Center Attack Group off Fedala and the French naval units based at Casablanca. The Air Group, commanded by Rear Adm. Ernest D. McWhorter, consisted of the fleet carrier *Ranger,* the escort carriers *Santee, Suwannee,* and *Sangamon,* and a screen of one light cruiser and nine destroyers.

Each of the three attack groups comprised a division of transports, a group of warships for fire support, one of the auxiliary aircraft carriers, destroyer screens for the transport, fire support, and carrier units, and one or more mine sweepers, mine layers, tankers, beacon submarines (which had been sent ahead), and service ships. The Center Attack Group was approximately twice the strength of either the Southern or Northern Attack Group. The cruiser *Augusta* served as one of the fire support vessels of Center Attack Group and as the task force headquarters ship. The fire support section of the Center Attack Group was to be in position to assist the Covering Group in containing the French naval threat from Casablanca against the transports off Fedala as well as to aid the landing force near Fedala. This arrangement subjected the *Augusta* to three somewhat incompatible demands upon her batteries and communications facilities.

The entire task force of more than 100 ships was too large to be sent from any one port in the United States without attracting undesired attention. It therefore assembled at sea after a series of departures at various times and places, seemingly for different destinations. First to leave were four reconnoitering submarines which were to assist the attacking groups in finding their exact

[29] Richard M. Leighton and Robert W. Coakley, *Global Logistics and Strategy: 1940–1943,* UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II (Washington, 1956).



MAJ. GEN. GEORGE S. PATTON, JR., ABOARD THE USS *AUGUSTA,* *the task force headquarters ship. Part of the convoy is barely visible in the background.*

destinations, and a fifth which was sent to keep watch over the port of Dakar. These submarines had been at sea several days when the first section of the transports and warships emerged from Hampton Roads on the afternoon of 23 October. The Air Group was then ostensibly engaged in maneuvers in Bermuda waters. The troopships and their protectors headed in that direction. Next morning, the second half of the troop transports with screening warships, including the cruiser *Augusta* with Admiral Hewitt and General Patton aboard, left Hampton Roads and took a northeasterly course as though bound for the United Kingdom. From Casco Bay, Maine, the Covering Group sortied in time to take its place at the front of the formation on 27 October, while the transports and warships, which had left Hampton Roads in two sections, were reuniting. On 28 October, the Air Group fell in behind the others. The convoy was then complete with two minor exceptions. The seaplane tender *Barnegat* joined the formation on 6 November after a voyage from Iceland. The *Contessa* overtook the Southern Attack Group on 7 November and continued under escort by the destroyer *Cowie* to its proper position off Mehdia among the ships of the Northern Attack Group.

The task force continued in formation from 28 October to 7 November, refueling en route, maintaining radio silence, and avoiding as much as possible all contacts with other ships. One Portuguese and one Spanish vessel were encountered and boarded but then allowed to continue. Detection by the enemy seems to have been prevented. From 4 to 6 November, the weather deteriorated severely, thus confirming radioed weather forecasts of adverse conditions at the time and place set for the landings.[30] Offsetting these forecasts was the more hopeful interpretation of Ad-

[30] (1) Msgs, AGWAR to USFOR, 6 Nov 42, CM-OUT 881, and 7 Nov 42, CM-OUT 1220. (2) Ltr, Patton to Marshall, 6 Nov 42. Copy in OPD Exec 8, Bk. 7, Tab 5.

miral Hewitt's weather officer that the fast-moving storm would have the effect of temporarily abating the high swell and surf at the landing points, perhaps long enough to establish firm beachheads, or to negotiate a surrender by the French. Instead of keeping this force together to cruise well out to sea until the general forecasts indicated feasible landing conditions, Admiral Hewitt decided to accept the risk of dividing it according to plan and to proceed to the three coastal objectives without delay.[81]

At daybreak on 7 November, the Southern Attack Group commanded by Rear Adm. Lyal A. Davidson split from the main formation and headed toward Safi. During the afternoon, the Northern Attack Group under command of Rear Adm. Monroe Kelly also diverged to take a course toward Mehdia. The other three groups, separating slightly, approached the Fedala–Casablanca area, remaining until dark as far offshore as possible while still permitting the transports to reach the debarkation area at midnight.

For the troops, the entire three weeks at sea had been a combination of activity and discomfort, for they were jammed into every available place on the transports, were fed in seemingly endless lines, and suffered seasickness, particularly during the days of rough weather. Yet they were brought up on deck for periods of exercise and engaged in detailed study or received general instruction on matters hitherto not touched upon in training.

On the approach voyage, there was much to be done in every echelon. General instruction was given to all officers and enlisted men regarding the customs of the Moroccan inhabitants. "The local population will respect strong, quiet men who live up to their promises," said a circular issued to the men. "Do not boast nor brag, and keep any agreement you make." A directive from General Patton to the officers admonished them that "there is not the least doubt but that we are better in all respects than our enemies, but to win, the men must KNOW this. It must be their absolute belief. WE MUST HAVE A SUPERIORITY COMPLEX!" [82]

Departure of the Center and Eastern Task Forces

The assault ships loading in the United Kingdom near Liverpool and Glasgow received their troop units late in September after most of the cargo had been stowed. The movement of troops to ports of embarkation was organized and controlled by the appropriate branch of the War Office, aided by members of the U.S. Transportation Corps. In spite of tendencies to be overly secretive or to reject orders received from a British agency, American ground and air units followed the complex schedule. Equipment, supplies, vehicles, and troops poured into the ports according to a carefully prepared program and, once aboard ship, were taken to the Firth of Clyde.[83]

[81] (1) Intervs with Capt Leo S. Bachmann (USN), 16 Jan 51, and Adm Hewitt, 23 Jan 51. The weather officer of the Western Task Force was Lt. Comdr. R. C. Steere. Admiral Hewitt did not intend, as is implied in Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations*, II, 50, to direct the Western Naval Task Force toward the Strait of Gibraltar.

[82] (1) Sub-Task Force BLACKSTONE FO 1, Intell Annex 1, App. 1; Dir, CG TF "A" to CG's, 3d Inf Div, 9th Inf Div, 2d Armd Div, and all attached Unit Comdrs of TF "A," 18 Sep 42. WDCSA 381 TORCH (9–18–42). (2) General Patton completed a perusal of the *Koran* during the voyage. Patton's Diary, 30 Oct 42. (See Note on Sources.)

[83] (1) Memo, Maj Gen N. G. Holmes for CG ETOUSA, sub: Deck loads. AFHQ AG 381 TORCH

On 17 October, the entire expedition, both Center Task Force and Eastern Assault Force, began to assemble there. The assault transports proceeded north to the vicinity of Loch Linnhe to hold a final rehearsal just before daylight, 19 October, then returned to the Clyde next day. Except for command post exercises ashore by a small portion of the men, all waited aboard until time to depart. Then the great troop convoy sailed for Africa.[34]

The first convoy, a group of 46 cargo vessels with 18 escorting warships, had already left port on 22 October on a schedule which would permit it to be overtaken by the second.[35] The troop convoy, 39 vessels with 12 escorting warships, comprised the combat-loaded transports of the Eastern Assault Force and Center Task Force. Commanding the consolidated armada was Rear Adm. Sir Harold Burrough (Br.), in the specially designed command ship *Bulolo*. With him were Generals Ryder (U.S.) and Evelegh (Br.), and Air Commodore G. M. Lawson (Br.).[36]

Second in command of the convoy was Commodore Thomas H. Troubridge (Br.) in another headquarters ship, the *Largs*. With him were Maj. Gen. Lloyd R. Fredendall (U.S.), Col. Lauris Norstad (Assistant Commander, U.S. Twelfth Air Force),[37] and Mr. Leland L. Rounds, who had recently been brought out from Oran, where he was an American Vice-Consul, to furnish liaison with friendly French elements ashore and to provide political intelligence to General Fredendall.[38] The escorts and most of the transports were British vessels, but the 39th Regimental Combat Team continued to Algiers in the combat-loaded transports which had brought it across the North Atlantic.[39] Some Polish and Dutch ships were included.

The men and matériel from the United Kingdom reached North Africa by voyages organized in an extremely complicated pattern. One problem of safe transit was solved by sending in advance as far as Gibraltar a number of slow colliers, tankers, tugs, and other auxiliary craft, as well as the three Maracaibo tankers which had been converted into tank landing ships. For the major convoys of troops and matériel, the Strait of Gibraltar was in effect a bottleneck. Transit into the Mediterranean during the darkness of two successive nights was scheduled for all except one small group of ships, which would enter in daylight. Before nearing the strait, both the slow convoy which had left the Clyde on 22 October and the fast convoy which departed on 26 October were to separate into sections destined for Algiers and Oran. Preceded by a screen of warships (Force H, Royal Navy), the Algiers sections of the slow and fast convoys were to enter the Mediterranean Sea during

File 2½, Tab 12, Env 27, Kansas City Rcds Ctr. (2) Interv with Col Donald S. McConnaughy in Paris, 11 May 45. Colonel McConnaughy was Chief of Operations, Office of the Chief of Transportation, and Special Liaison Officer, British War Office, at the time TORCH was being mounted in the United Kingdom. Hist Rcds ETOUSA. (3) Heavey, *Down Ramp*, pp. 21–30.

[34] Heavey, *Down Ramp*, pp. 21, 30.

[35] Principal sources for these approach voyages are: Incl 1 (Rpt of The Naval Commander, Center Task Force) and Incl 2 (Rpt of The Naval Commander, Eastern Task Force), in NCXF, Report of Proceedings, Operation TORCH. AFHQ Micro Job 8, Reels 16A–17A.

[36] General Anderson, Commanding General, Eastern Task Force, was at Gibraltar with General Eisenhower.

[37] Brig Gen James H. Doolittle, Commanding General, Twelfth Air Force, was with General Eisenhower at Gibraltar.

[38] Interv with Mr. Rounds, 21 Oct 48.

[39] *Leedstown, Samuel Chase, Thomas Stone, and Almaack.*

the night of 5–6 November. During daylight, 6 November, the Oran section of the slow convoy was to follow, and in darkness, 6–7 November, the Oran section of the fast convoy was at last to pass through the narrow waterway. Inside the Mediterranean, the separate sections were to consolidate in the Eastern and Center Naval Task Forces, the process being somewhat further complicated by the successive refueling of some ships in Gibraltar harbor, and by later supply from tankers at an advanced position in the Mediterranean. Two additional convoys from the United Kingdom were to be well along the way to the Algiers and Oran areas by the time the assaulting forces arrived off the landing beaches.

Moving such a large armada in accordance with this pattern required a masterly organization which might have suffered from its unavoidable complexities as well as from enemy attack. Actually, the plan was executed with extraordinary success. Between the Clyde and Gibraltar, no submarine sighted the ships although they passed through an area near which more than a score of Axis submarines were believed to be operating. One submarine, which was sighted at a distance of twenty-five miles from the convoy by a naval air patrol, was kept submerged long enough to permit the ships to pass unreported. On 4 November, the Algiers and Oran sections of the convoys separated without the benefit of protective, long-range, antisubmarine air patrols. The seaplanes equipped for such missions had all become inoperable and the weather conditions at Gibraltar prevented land-based craft from undertaking the task. In midafternoon, the Oran portion of the fast convoy steamed to the west while its destroyer screen made several aggressive attacks on submarines detected by warning apparatus. No results were observed, but the transports remained unscathed. After an interval of twenty-one and a half hours, the Oran-bound ships reversed course and approached the strait after nightfall, 6 November. Thirty hours remained before the assault landings would begin.

Axis Situation in the Mediterranean on the Eve of the Attack

The convoys were approaching an area in which serious changes had occurred since the Allied decision in July to undertake an operation against French North Africa. At that time, it will be remembered, the British Eighth Army had been driven far into Egypt and had taken its stand on what was known as the El 'Alamein line. The British and the Axis forces had then withstood each other's probing attacks and had prepared for a return to the offensive. Rommel organized a single strong defensive position with considerable depth from which he intended to attack as soon as possible. The Axis leaders had calculated that the relative situation of the two adversaries would be best for the *Panzer Army Africa* late in August, for thereafter the British ability, in spite of lengthy supply lines, to deliver reinforcements and matériel in great quantities would enable the Eighth Army to acquire an ever-increasing margin of superiority in numbers, weapons, and battlefield resupply.[40] The Prime Minister devoted close personal attention to the situation and revised the command by installing Gen. Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander as Commander in Chief, Middle East, and Lt. Gen. Sir

[40] (1) MS # T–3 (Nehring, *et al.*), Pt. II, Ch. III. (2) Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass*, pp. 199–210. (3) MS # C–075, *Endgueltige Stellungnahme zu der Geschichte des Feldzuges in Nordafrika, 1941–1943* (Kesselring).

Bernard L. Montgomery as Commanding General, Eighth Army.[41] Preparations were made by these leaders to execute exactly the tactics which the enemy would have preferred to adopt himself, that is, to await an offensive, meet it in prepared defensive positions, and, after getting everything in readiness, counterattack.[42]

One major change in the Mediterranean theater had taken place with the revival of Malta as a base for British attacks against the Axis line of sea communications to Tripoli. The use of aircraft carriers from Gibraltar to ferry planes within flying distance of Malta enabled the Royal Air Force to resume powerful attacks from Malta airfields on Axis shipping. Submarines from Malta also claimed many a victim. The enemy resorted to coastal traffic from Tripoli eastward to Bengasi and Derna in small, shallow-draft vessels. Hitler recognized in mid-September that Malta must again be neutralized. The Luftwaffe's resources were unequal to this added demand, while German and Italian troops that had once been designated to seize the island (the canceled Operation *HERKULES*) were committed in Libya, a move which left insufficient ground forces. Among the Italian military leaders, daily review of the situation in the Mediterranean brought them back to the same themes, *"Malta e nafta"* (Malta and fuel).[43]

That Hitler recognized the danger of an attack by the Allies in 1942 was shown in certain defensive measures which he ordered that summer. Several armored divisions were withdrawn to western France from the Eastern Front; this step deprived his commanders of the means of exploiting the initial successes on the southern section of that front.[44] Hitler acknowledged his concern when Grossadmiral Erich Raeder in August warned that the Allies might be preparing to enter French North Africa with the connivance of the French and thus to inflict a very serious blow to the Axis coalition.[45] He became alarmed lest the Allied reinforcements in the Middle East presage the seizure of Crete rather than an attack against Rommel's strong defensive position, and he ordered that that island's garrison be increased to repel seaborne and airborne attacks. To insure that the complicated process of resisting an amphibious attack should be conducted with unity of command, he charged Kesselring, directly under himself, with the defense of all the coasts in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas which were held by German troops, excepting those in Rommel's sector.[46]

The threat of an Allied invasion in the western Mediterranean was met in conformity with German, rather than with Italian, views of appropriate action despite

[41] Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate,* pp. 457–71.

[42] (1) Field Marshal Sir Bernard Law Montgomery, *El Alamein to the Rio Sangro* (London and New York, 1948), pp. 1–12. (2) MS # T–3–P1 (Kesselring), Pt. I. (3) MS # T–3 (Nehring, *et al.*), Pt. II, Ch. III.

[43] (1) Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate,* pp. 505–06. (2) MS # T–3–P1 (Kesselring), Pt. I. (3) Hitler's Order, 14 Sep 42, *OKW/WFSt/Op Nr. 003142/42,* ONI, *Fuehrer Directives,* 1942–1945. (4) Cavallero, *Comando Supremo,* pp. 347, 348. (5) Vice-Adm. Eberhard Weichold, *The War at Sea in the Mediterranean,* Pt. I, pp. 18–23.

[44] General der Artillerie Walter Warlimont, (Deputy Chief, OKW/WFSt) "A Summary of the German Campaigns, 1939–Sep 43," p. 12 (SAIC/FIR/11, dated 24 Jul 45).

[45] Conf, 26 Aug 42, ONI, *Fuehrer Conferences, 1942.*

[46] (1) Hitler's Orders, 14 Sep and 13 Oct 42, *OKW/WFSt/Op Nr. 003142/42* and *OKW/WFSt/Op Nr. 551743/42, ONI, Fuehrer Directives,* 1942–1945. (2) MS # C–065a, *Aufzeichnungen ueber de Lagevortraege und Besprechungen im Fuehrerhauptquartier vom 12. August bis zum 17. Maerz 1943* (Greiner), 8 and 15 Sep 42.

the fiction that the Mediterranean was Mussolini's theater of war. German policy from 1940 to 1942 was to refrain from moving into unoccupied France in order to prevent creation of a French government in North Africa opposed to the Axis powers. *Comando Supremo* professed in October to have much less concern with plans and preparations for seizing unoccupied France than with countermeasures against Allied invasion of French North Africa and West Africa. Moreover, Rommel's line of supply could, *Comando Supremo* believed, be much improved if the Axis made full use of Tunisia's ports and airfields rather than limiting itself as it had thus far in 1942.

Two Italian divisions were held in reserve in western Tripolitania at points from which they could speedily enter Tunisia. Both of the Axis partners recognized that an incursion into Tunisia would arouse French hostility. The Germans, presumably, did not desire a repetition of the Greek fiasco of 1940 and in spite of the Italian attitude decided to continue to adhere to the policy of friendly relations with the Vichy government. The Germans believed that any other course might precipitate a French attachment to the Anglo-American Allies. Axis policy therefore remained, in response to German insistence, that of waiting in readiness to send forces into Tunisia in the role of friendly protectors acceptable to the French government at Vichy. Rommel would have to get along without the Tunisian ports.[47]

In mid-October neither Italian nor German intelligence deemed an Allied invasion of the Mediterranean area to be imminent. No operation was expected until spring. The place where the attack would then come was a matter of disagreement. When indications of an earlier Allied operation were noted at Gibraltar, the Italians still considered an attack on French Morocco most likely. If unopposed by Axis forces, the Allies would reach Bizerte in about one month and, from that point, were expected to hit the Italian mainland, an operation which it was feared would have a disastrous effect on the Egyptian campaign and the whole Italian war effort.[48] The Germans were inclined to expect an attack to seize Dakar and thereafter, if the Mediterranean area were invaded at all, most of them thought the Allies would bypass French North Africa to close on Rommel's rear area or to gain a bridgehead on the other side of the Mediterranean. Actually, both Axis partners were much surprised when the attacking force did in fact appear in the Strait of Gibraltar.[49]

The last opportunity for the Axis forces to attack the British Eighth Army on anything like equal terms came at the end of

[47] (1) Msg, *German General, Rome, Nr. 5186/42* to *OKH/Op Abt*, 10 Oct 42, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt*, File *S IV—Chefsachen, Feindbeurteilung u. eigene Absichten Teil II* (hereafter cited as *OKH/Op Abt S IV—Chefsachen, Teil II*). (2) Msg, *OKW/WFSt Nr. 551768/42* to *German General, Rome*, and others, 17 Oct 42 in *Deutsche Waffen Stillstandkommission (German Armistice Commission—DWStK), Chefsachen, 1941–1943.* The headquarters of the *German Armistice Commission* was in Wiesbaden, Germany. (3) Msg, *DWStK, Gruppe Wehrmacht (Armed Forces Section—Gr We) DWStK/Gr We/Ia Nr. 6/42* to *OKW/Chef WFSt*, 18 Oct 42, in *DWStK, Chefsachen, 1941–1943.*

[48] (1) Views of Generale di Brigata Cesare Amè, chief of the Italian *S. I. M. (Italian Army Intelligence)*, quoted in Msg, *DWStK/Gr We Nr. 6/42* to *OKW/Chef WFSt*, 18 Oct 42, in *DWStK Chefsachen, 1941–1943.* (2) Adm. Franco Maugeri (ed. by Victor Rosen), *From the Ashes of Disgrace* (New York, 1948), p. 86. Its author was in 1942 head of *S. I. S. (Italian Naval Intelligence)*.

[49] Msg, *OKW/WFSt Nr. 551768/42* to *German General, Rome*, and others, 17 Oct 42, in *DWStK, Chefsachen, 1941–1943.*

August. Reserves of fuel and other supplies had been accumulated so slowly that no attack could be undertaken before that date, and, even then, the most careful estimates indicated that the operation would require 400 to 500 cubic meters more of gasoline than was on hand. Kesselring, upon learning that this deficiency alone stood in the path of an attack, undertook to furnish the required amount from Luftwaffe reserves. Thus on 30–31 August, depending upon tankers at sea for fuel which would be needed to continue operations in case of an initial success, the *Panzer Army Africa* moved to an attack. The battle of 'Alam el Halfa followed.

The battle was won by the Eighth Army not only because of the scanty resources with which the offensive was begun but also because the British had correctly foreseen the plan of attack and had adopted appropriate countermeasures. To open the gaps in the mine fields through which the Axis armor was expected to pass by moonlight in order to make an early morning assault against Montgomery's deep southern flank proved much more difficult than the Germans had anticipated. The deep soft sand into which many Axis vehicles were lured slowed progress and used up fuel. Sandstorms which deterred the Allied air units from maximum effectiveness during the first day ceased to give that protection after nightfall. Parachute flares by night and clear weather by day thereafter enabled bombers to inflict severe injury on Rommel's forces, supplementing the heavy artillery fire which fell on his units concentrated in the mine-field passages. The attack lost momentum as it neared the main British lines on 'Alam el Halfa ridge, about 15 miles southeast of El 'Alamein, and was broken off in failure on 3–5 September. Axis troops were forced to reoccupy their former defensive positions. They maintained contact, but no resumption of the attack could be foreseen. Axis losses in this battle were recorded as 570 killed, 1,800 wounded, and 570 prisoners of the Allies, as well as 50 tanks, 400 trucks, 15 field pieces, and 35 antitank guns.[50]

The British Eighth Army spent the next seven weeks reinforcing its units and replenishing stocks, arriving at an ample margin of superiority not only in troops but in tanks, guns, aviation, and mobility. Its morale was excellent. The plan of battle was well calculated to overcome the enemy's capabilities and meet his disposition of forces. The attack began on 23 October with a thundering artillery preparation such as the Western Desert had never before experienced.[51]

Panzer Army Africa had remained in defensive positions near El 'Alamein to receive the British attack. It might have fallen back nearer Tobruk, developing successive positions into which to retire. It might have stationed the major elements in intermediate positions behind a forward screen which simulated a major defense, and have counterattacked when the attacking forces had been somewhat disorganized by the initial operations. But it did neither. Rommel himself departed to take a rest leave on the Continent, turning over command to his deputy, General der Panzertruppen Georg Stumme. General der Panzertruppen Walther Nehring, commander of the *German Africa Corps,* had been wounded in the bat-

[50] (1) Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass,* pp. 199–223. (2) MS # T–3–P1 (Kesselring), Pt. I. (3) Montgomery, *El Alamein to the Rio Sangro,* pp. 5–10.

[51] Montgomery, *El Alamein to the Rio Sangro,* pp. 18–19.

tle just concluded, and left Africa to convalesce near Berlin.[52]

Allied planners chose 23 October as D Day to launch the attack of the British Eighth Army in deference to tactical requirements, not to any timetable of high-level strategy. The victory was won barely in time for its impact to be felt by men faced with crucial decisions concerning the Mediterranean. On 2 November, after ten days of severe combat had worn both armies down, Rommel, who had been recalled from leave and arrived in Africa on 25 October, warned the Axis leadership to expect a serious disaster. His forces were exhausted, quite unable to withstand the armored thrusts which the enemy might be expected to deliver within twenty-four hours. Orderly withdrawal by his nonmotorized Italian and German units would not be possible. In this situation "the gradual annihilation of this Army must be expected . . ." were his concluding words.[53] A little later he reported the *German Africa Corps* down to twenty-four tanks and gave indications of drastic losses, both Italian and German.

Hitler replied that no other course could be considered except stubborn resistance. "The troops," he declared, "can be led only to victory or to death." [54] Mussolini's orders through *Comando Supremo* were to hold the front in Egypt at any price. The situation on the battlefield deteriorated further on 3 November as these impossible orders were being drafted so far away, and when Kesselring arrived next day by air from Crete to consult with Rommel he was soon persuaded that the commander must have discretionary authority to conduct his battle as the circumstances might dictate. He joined that noon in such a request, which later was conceded by Hitler and Mussolini. It was too late to save thousands of men. Some Italian units had been forced to withdraw even earlier to avoid being cut off, and Rommel intended that all his mobile elements should pull back fighting to the next feasible line of defense. The rest would be left behind. *Comando Supremo* sent reinforcements toward the Salum–Halfāya area, farther west, while Rommel's army was either driven from the battlefield or captured. The prevailing confusion left the extent of his defeat for later computation.[55]

The Allies could look back a few months later to the Battle of El 'Alamein and recognize that the tide in the Mediterranean had then turned definitely. This victory was the first of a long series of almost uninterrupted triumphs over Axis forces which ended in the Po River valley. In a sense it was the Gettysburg of the African campaign. The fact that Rommel flew back from Germany to assume the command of his army shortly after General Stumme died in action, while executing Rommel's plans,[56] is a circumstance which permitted later analysis of the battle as an encounter between two of the ablest field commanders of the war, and

[53] *Panzer Army Africa* was renamed *German-Italian Panzer Army* (*Deutsch-Italienische Panzerarmee*) on 25 October 1942.

(1) Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass*, pp. 199–223. (2) MS # D–086, *Die 1. Phase der Kaempfe in Tunesien bis zur Uebernahme des Befehls durch das neugebildete Oberkommando der 5. Panzerarmee am 9.XII.1942* (Nehring). (3) MS # T–3–P1 (Kesselring), Pt. I.

[54] Msg, Rommel *German-Italian Panzer Army Nr. 132/42* to *OKH/Op Abt*, 2 Nov 42, in *OKH/Op Abt*, File S IV–*Chefsachen, Teil II*.

[55] Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass*, p. 268.

[56] (1) *Ibid.*, pp. 268–75. (2) Exchange of orders and messages, *Befehle des O. K. W. und Meldungen an O. K. W. vom 3.–5.XI.42*, photostat copies under covering Ltr SS-Oberfuehrer Alfred-Ingemar Berndt to Rommel, 3 May 43, in File CRS, Rcd Gp 1048, EAP–21–X–14/60.

[56] Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass*, p. 247.

which will no doubt encourage its study for years to come.

The battle of El 'Alamein yielded certain results distinctly beneficial to the Allies. Axis military prestige suffered most opportunely. Collapse of the Axis advance toward the Nile subjected the German–Italian partnership to the undermining influence of mutual recrimination. Rommel's position as an Axis field commander suffered an eclipse, partial among Germans and total among Italians. The latter henceforth distrusted Rommel. Some Germans blamed him for disregarding obvious logistical restrictions. Hitler concluded that Rommel needed a rest but postponed replacing him. When the Allies arrived off the African coast, the opposing coalition was already beginning to weaken.

That the Allied system of command would function as well during operations as for planning remained to be seen, but it was already apparent that the Axis command structure was defective in both areas. No unified Axis Mediterranean theater existed. Major operational decisions were ostensibly made either by Mussolini himself, or in his name by the *Comando Supremo;* but actually they were made in collaboration with the Germans, whose counsel often took the form of completely drawn up orders which the Italians passed on to their troops intact. Each of the German armed services had a headquarters in Rome. That of the German Air Force's *OB SUED* was under the senior German officer in the Mediterranean area, Field Marshal Kesselring. He outranked but had not yet superseded the *German General, Rome,* Enno von Rintelen, as a channel for conveying German views to the Italian high command. This confusing situation was made even more difficult as a result of the fact that Kesselring held the mission of facilitating by sea and air, partly by command and partly by co-ordination, German and Italian support of operations in Africa and the Balkans and defense of the coasts. Rommel's operations were not subject to Kesselring's control. Rommel looked to others, not to Kesselring, for supplies. Although this tangle was eventually simplified, the Allied coalition in the Mediterranean began with a system of command superior to that of the Axis and was, in fact, to retain that superiority to the war's end.

Finding a French Leader

All other measures taken by the Allies to minimize resistance by the French were subordinate to an understanding with a suitable French leader, one who could rally the armed forces of French North Africa in renewed war against the Axis powers. Such a man must be a personage, a man holding a position of unmistakable patriotism and endowed with such superlative qualities of leadership that he could persuade loyal officers of the French armed forces to seize the opportunity to liberate France. All French officers were bound to Marshal Pétain by oaths which they would have to violate, an action which could be expected only in disciplined response to orders from their immediate superiors. Thus the actual problem was to find a new leader to whom the higher command in French North Africa would adhere, and in support of whom it would issue appropriate orders to the lower echelons.

Could such a leader be found in the existing structure of Vichy's military establishment? Admiral Darlan, next in succession to Marshal Pétain, and commander in chief of all the armed forces of his government,

had confided to the U.S. Ambassador, Admiral Leahy, late in 1941 that he might be ready to dissociate himself from the policy of collaboration and lead his countrymen to the side of the Allies if he were supported by sufficient American aircraft, tanks, and effective troops.[57] His conduct left doubts whether he was motivated more by ambition or by patriotism. If he were apprised of Allied intentions, would he assist or would he betray the project?

Gen. Alphonse Juin, senior military officer in French North Africa and commander in chief of the French Army there, had been released from prison by the Germans after Weygand's recall from Algiers late in 1941, but was no collaborationist. He was under orders to defend the French territories against invasion by any forces whatsoever, and he included in his preparations elaborate plans to resist an attack into Tunisia and eastern Algeria which could only come from the Axis countries.[58] He intended to execute his orders, even against the Germans, and believed that he would be supported in such action by Admiral Darlan, if not by all at Vichy.[59] The Allies could not have chosen an associate better able to assist them but more unwilling to take the initiative in defiance of his instructions from above.

Gen. Auguste Paul Noguès, Resident General of Morocco, had shown marked zeal in 1940 in organizing and preparing for eventual resumption by the French Army of hostilities against the Axis powers, especially by concealing from the armistice commissioners both troops and matériel in excess of the permitted amounts. But by 1942 he seemed to Mr. Murphy to have become dispirited by the long delay. His intentions as late as 6 October 1942 were to resist any Allied invasion not strong enough to repel probable countermeasures by the Axis forces, and it could be doubted, despite his antagonism toward the Germans and their cordial distrust of him, that he would assume the burden of breaking with Marshal Pétain's authority.[60]

Lt. Gen. Louis-Marie Koeltz, commanding the 19th Région Militaire in Algiers, or Maj. Gen. Georges Barré, commanding the Tunis Division, each the principal troop commander in his territory, and Vice Adm. Raymond Fenard, Secretary-General of French North Africa, or Vice Adm. Jean-Pierre Estéva, Resident General of Tunisia, each a protégé of Admiral Darlan high in the civil administration of French North African territories, had considerable prestige but could not be expected to lead a break with the government at Vichy.

[57] (1) William D. Leahy, *I Was There* (New York, 1950), pp. 469–72. (2) Rads, Murphy to Dept of State, 20 Oct 42, and 5 Nov 42. Copies in OPD 336 Sec 2, Case 22.

[58] Commandant-en-Chef français, civil et militaire, Etat-major, 3e Bureau, Rapport des opérations en Tunisie (hereafter cited as Giraud Hq, Rapport des opérations, p. 12. (See Note on Sources.)

[59] (1) This he told Murphy through Major Dorange on 20 October 1942. Copy of this report in OPD 336 Sec 2, Case 22. (2) Interv, Marcel Vigneras with Gen Juin, 5 Dec 48. (3) Ltr, Murphy to author, 31 Jan 50.

[60] (1) Interv, Marcel Vigneras with Gen A. Guillaume, 23 Nov 48; Ltr, Robert D. Murphy to author, 31 Jan 50; Ltr, Gen Noguès to author, 28 Jan and 23 Mar 50, containing notes on American landings in North Africa. (2) *OKH/GenStdH/Fremde Heere West, Heereskontrollinspektion (Bourges), V.O. Fremde Heere West Nr. 97/42,* 13 Feb 42, Personality Appraisal Sketches of Leading French Generals in Northwest Africa, in File CRS, Rcd Gp 1027, OKH/H2/187, Sec Kriegsstaatssekretariat. (3) Msg, *DWStK/Gr We Nr. 365/42 to OKW/WFSt,* 27 Oct 42, Rpt on Conf Chief *DWStK* (Morocco) with Adm Darlan on 24 Oct 42, in File *OKW/WFSt Sonderakte Vorgaenge Frankreich.*

Although a leader taken from Marshal Pétain's military establishment might well provide the greatest immediate advantages to the Allies, those benefits could be gained only at severe risk. The political consequences would be bad wherever, outside French North Africa, the Vichy government was believed to be wholly collaborationist and was an object of distrust or hatred. But equally important from the strictly military point of view, the vital element of surprise would have to be forfeited as far as the French were concerned and, perhaps, the Axis enemies as well. Axis countermeasures during the approach, the landings, and the advance into Tunisia might be prepared in time to inflict severe injuries. Had the Allies been able to take into their confidence the right Vichy French leaders,[61] the inner core of the resistance organization in the French armed forces might have arranged for only a nominal show of opposition intended to delay Axis retaliation, but the betrayal of such a confidence would have brought disaster. The risk seemed too great.

Could the Allies find an eminent person outside the Vichy establishment able to assume French civil and military leadership in French North Africa, some high-ranking officer who would accept a role of dissidence for reasons of higher patriotism? They would have to take their chances on his ability to win over the higher military commanders in French North Africa. Such a candidate appeared in the person of General Giraud.

Giraud, then in his early sixties, had achieved considerable distinction in a military career which involved many years of service in Morocco; combat, capture, and escape in both World Wars; instruction for three years at L'Ecole Supérieure de Guerre in Paris, membership on Le Conseil Supérieure de la Guerre, and four-star rank as commander of the French Seventh Army in 1940. His escape from the Koenigstein prison in Saxony through Switzerland to unoccupied France in April 1942 had attracted wide attention. He had undertaken to support Marshal Pétain's authority and had been permitted to retire into southern France, near Lyon. There he wrote a long analysis of the causes of France's downfall in 1940 and planned for a day when Frenchmen might again fight for their freedom.[62]

Mr. Robert Murphy returned to Algiers from his visits to London and New York in September with instructions to establish communications between Giraud and Eisenhower. He had just reached Algiers when he was approached by a representative of Admiral Darlan, who revealed that Darlan was being rapidly driven toward a choice between far closer collaboration with the Germans and coming over to the side of the United States, bringing with him the French fleet. To adopt the latter alternative, he required guarantees of ample American aid to offset French deficiencies in military equipment. Here was a situation which required not only a choice by Darlan but another choice, more pressing than he realized, by the Allies. Murphy recommended that his government attempt to bring about a co-operative relationship between Giraud and Darlan.[63]

[61] The political consequences would have been serious in view of the contamination of all by the collaborationist record of so many, and the undiscriminating condemnation of Vichy by the Gaullists.

[62] (1) G. Ward Price, *Giraud and the African Scene* (New York, 1944), pp. 1–63. (2) Henri Giraud, *Mes évasions* (Paris, 1946), *passim*.

[63] Msg, Murphy to OPD for Eisenhower, 16 Oct 42. In OPD 336 Sec 2, Case 22.

Although General Giraud's residence in southern France was kept under surveillance, he had established communication with French patriots in Algiers and through them with others in the major centers of French North Africa, as well as with demobilized officers in France, and looked ahead with eagerness to the spring of 1943 when he hoped, with American aid, to bring about a successful return to arms in unoccupied France. His plans and communications were necessarily subject to the utmost secrecy. His principal representative in Algiers was Maj. Gen. Charles E. Mast, commander of the Algiers Division since September 1942. In Casablanca, the commander of the Casablanca Division, Maj. Gen. Émile Béthouart, veteran of Narvik, was also an adherent of Giraud. Other officers of the French Army and various civilians were prepared to uphold Giraud in overthrowing the authority of the government at Vichy if necessary in order to resume the war against the Axis powers. He had channels of communication with the Allied leaders through his friends in Algiers and through the U.S. Military Attaché at Bern, Switzerland,[64] and perhaps for a short time through the American embassy at Vichy. While Giraud's willingness to cooperate with the Allies was being ascertained, Mast assured Murphy that Giraud would prefer to act apart from Darlan and that Giraud could alone rally the French Army in North Africa, gain the adherence of the French Navy there, and make it possible for the Allies to "gain entry practically without firing a shot." [65] Mast was confident that the time had arrived not only to reach an agreement with Giraud but to discuss specific military plans in staff talks; therefore he proposed via Murphy a rendezvous near Cherchel, about ninety miles west of Algiers, on the night of 21 October. Five days' notice was very short indeed.

Murphy's reports produced intense concern and lively activity in London and Washington. Generals Eisenhower and Clark, the Prime Minister, and the British Chiefs of Staff concluded that Giraud should be recognized as "our principal collaborator on the French side" and as Governor General of all French North Africa, responsible for civil and military affairs, and as such should receive Allied support and protection. At the same time, they approved General Eisenhower's further proposal that Giraud be requested to negotiate with Darlan and to accept him in a military role which would be mutually agreeable. In effect, they agreed that one friendly French leader would be good but that two would be better, especially when one controlled the French fleet at Toulon. General Eisenhower then had in mind the early activation of the American Fifth Army under General Clark and the elevation of the French commander in chief to succeed Clark as deputy commander in chief.[66] The British Chiefs of Staff, however, believed that no civil and military governor general could properly also serve as the Allied deputy commander in chief, so that the latter position would be available only to Darlan. All agreed that, because of insufficient ships, escorts, and ports, it would be impracticable to meet Giraud's wish for simultaneous assistance to the French Army in southern France during the invasion of French North Africa. As Giraud was think-

[64] Phone conv with Miss Constance Harvey (former U.S. Vice-Consul at Lyons) 27 Jul 51.

[65] Msg, Murphy to OPD for Eisenhower, 16 Oct 42, CM-OUT 5218.

[66] Msg, London to AGWAR, 17 Oct 42, CM-IN 7296.

ing of an invasion in the spring, and could not yet be informed of the actual Allied plans, the most that could be told him at this juncture was that the aid he desired would be hastened by an easy occupation of northwestern Africa.[67]

Preparations in London to send a delegation for the projected staff talks at Cherchel on 21 October went forward while in Washington the draft instructions concerning association with Giraud and Darlan were under consideration.

The men selected for the hazardous mission were: General Clark, Brig. Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer (head of the AFHQ G–3 Section), Col. Archelaus L. Hamblen (AFHQ G–4), Capt. Jerauld Wright, USN (AFHQ liaison officer with the U.S. Navy), and Col. Julius Holmes (of AFHQ G–1), who had been supervising a civil affairs section and who was able to act as interpreter. Clark's instructions, which were drafted after the President's views on this critical matter were reported, covered various aspects of the projected relationship. Darlan must not be mentioned; to propose him as a future French commander in chief might well disrupt the negotiations. Clark was to declare that selection of a French commander for French forces was "a matter to be handled by the French themselves." This principle would be joined with the parallel guarantee that the Americans would not interfere with French civil government. To dispel any fears of a future British hold on French colonial territory, Clark was also to emphasize the American control of the operation. Finally, Clark was authorized to indicate to the French that only under such conditions as General Eisenhower had envisaged in his talks with Murphy near London would a French commander in chief over all North Africa eventually be accepted; in the interim, the Americans would equip and supply French troops engaged in fighting the Axis powers.[68]

The meeting near Cherchel later became one of the better-known exploits of the war. While the Allied commander in chief went to Scotland on a scheduled inspection of final amphibious rehearsals by some of his assault units, General Clark's group started by air and submarine for a point on the African coast fifteen miles west of Cherchel. The submarine voyage from Gibraltar to the vicinity of the rendezous was completed too late to land before daylight of 21 October, so the party remained submerged most of the day. Those waiting at the villa, discouraged by their fruitless vigil, drove back at dawn to Algiers, expecting to make a second try two nights later. A radio sent from the submarine to Gibraltar and relayed to Algiers over the Office of Strategic Services secret radio chain, brought Mr. Murphy, Vice-Consul Ridgeway B. Knight, and some of the French back to the scene at midnight, 21–22 October, while General Mast and his staff appeared shortly before 0500. The meeting was held in a seaside villa loaned by a sympathetic owner.

An initial special conference brought together Generals Clark, Lemnitzer, and Mast, Lt. Col. Louis G. M. Jousse, and Mr. Murphy. General Mast was told that the Allies had decided to send to North Africa a large American force, supported in the air and on the sea by British units. He in turn advised the Americans to prepare for the swiftest possible movement into Tunisia to counterbalance the Axis capacity to begin sending in troops by air within thirty-six

[67] Msg, London to AGWAR, 17 Oct 42, CM-IN 7368.

[68] Msg, WD to ETOUSA, 17 Oct 42, CM-OUT 5682.

hours of the first American landings. He also urged the necessity of retaining the bridgehead in southern France by simultaneous aid to French forces waiting there.

The discussion shifted to the role to be played by General Giraud. It was agreed, first, that he should receive directly from the Allies a letter setting forth their intentions and, second, that if Giraud consented to come to North Africa he should be brought out by an American submarine. A draft letter was prepared, subject to approval by General Eisenhower, which proposed: first, the restoration of France to its 1939 boundaries; second, acceptance of France as an ally; and third, assumption of the supreme command in North Africa by the French "at the appropriate time" following the landings, the establishment of bases, and the rearming of French troops.[69]

In a general conference among all the officers, much precise intelligence was furnished by the French and the fact was emphasized that the Blida airdrome at Algiers and the garrison and airdrome at Bône were controlled by adherents of General Giraud.

After barely eluding French police by hiding in an empty wine cellar while the villa was searched, and after braving high surf and rough seas to return in frail landing craft to the submarine, the party set out for Gibraltar, and from there radioed to London a report of its achievement.[70] On 25 October in two B–17's, they reached England. The Western Task Force had by then already commenced its voyage to the landing beaches. The other task forces were about to sail. Additional intelligence was radioed to Hewitt and Patton on the *Augusta* and turned to account also in Eastern Task Force plans. The participants scattered to their respective tasks, the French still unaware that the operation was so near, and that part of the expeditionary forces were actually on the way.

The terms of association with Giraud remained to be established. His general position, as he wrote to a fellow countryman, was: "We don't want the Americans to free us; we want them to help us free ourselves, which is not quite the same." [71] Preliminary negotiations elicited a provisional draft embodying his views of the Allied proposals, but official proffer of support by the Allies awaited adjustments concerning the matter of command that would meet Gen-

[69] (1) Before approving the letter to General Giraud, General Eisenhower felt compelled to clarify the conditions for transferring command to the French; these conditions called for delay, and even at the time of transfer provided that the American commander would continue controlling French North Africa as a base for operations against the Axis. Only defense would be "turned over to French command." (2) General Mast estimated the French forces which could be rearmed as: eight infantry and two armored divisions, plus separate tank, artillery and service units—all ready within one month. Msg, London to AGWAR, 29 Oct 42, CM-IN 12,809.

[70] (1) Accounts of this submarine trip by several of the participants have been published. The narrative above is based primarily on the unpublished official report by General Clark to General Eisenhower, dated 30 October 1942, augmented by Clark's memoir, *Calculated Risk,* pp. 67–89. (2) See also Ridgeway B. Knight, "General Clark's Secret Mission to Algeria on October 21, 1942," *American Foreign Service Journal,* XX (March, 1943), 122–23. (3) Brig. Gen. Julius C. Holmes, "Eisenhower's African Gamble," Collier's, CXVII (January 12, 1946), 14–15, 33–34. (4) *Les Cahiers Français Information* (published by Direction de la documentations), No. 47 (August 1943), p. 10. (5) Frederick C. Painton, *"Secret Mission to North Africa," Readers' Digest,* XLII (May, 1943). (6) Msg 4057, London to AGWAR, 25 Oct 42, CM-IN 10601. ETOUSA Outgoing Cables, Kansas City Rcds Ctr. This is a relay to Stimson and Marshall of Clark's message to Eisenhower. (7) Barjot, *Le débarquement du 8 Novembre en Afrique du Nord,* pp. 81–93.

[71] Ltr, Giraud to Gen Robert Odic (Ret.), 15 Oct 42. Copy in Smith Papers.

eral Eisenhower's views.[72] At some point in his negotiations with the Allies, if not through Mr. Murphy, he listed four conditions governing his acceptance, of which one was that he should be commander in chief of Allied troops on French soil wherever French troops were fighting. On a memorandum naming the conditions, which has survived in his handwriting, is written in the lower left corner, "O. K. Roosevelt." [73] The authenticity of this document cannot be established, but Giraud's expectations that this condition would be met came as a great surprise to the Allied Commander in chief later, for the negotiations conducted through Murphy in Algiers with Giraud in southern France had remained inconclusive on the matter of command.[74]

Giraud had made clear on 27 October that he believed the American command over the landings should be transformed after some forty-eight hours into an inter-Allied command ashore, and that in French North Africa he should be the Allied commander in chief. Murphy stated the three central features of Allied policy: (1) France would be fully restored to her prewar boundaries and sovereign independence; (2) purely French national matters would be left for determination by the French without American interference; (3) "the government of the United States regards the French nation as an ally and will deal with it as such." As to the inter-Allied command, he suggested that the transfer of command from American to French hands might follow the rearmament of French forces in French North Africa with American matériel, but left the decision to be reached directly between Eisenhower and Giraud.

These proposals, officially presented in informal letters dated 2 November, were in Giraud's possession when he was summoned to leave his retreat and thus catapulted into the situation to which the proposals applied. He had a hard choice, for a decision to cooperate with the Americans required him to advance the date for rallying the French several months; it also meant that simultaneous military action in southern France, which he considered vital to effective liberation of all France, must be abandoned. He decided to co-operate, but if he answered the letters of 2 November, his reply was not received before he himself appeared to state his views. Thus a friendly French military leader was found by the Allies at the very last minute, and in circumstances certain to produce much subsequent difficulty.[75]

[72] (1) Rad, Murphy to ACofS OPD, 26 Oct 42. Copy in OPD Exec 3, Item 2*a*. (2) Algiers Despatch 76 with incls, Murphy to Secy of State, 22 Mar 43. State Dept Archives. This file includes all Mr. Murphy's correspondence with General Giraud on the subject of command. (3) Ltr, Murphy to author, 31 Jan 50. (4) Henri Giraud, *Un seul but: la victoire* (Paris, 1950), pp. 348–52. (5) Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, pp. 331–34.

[73] (1) Giraud, *Un seul but: la victoire*, p. 335. (2) Albert Kammerer, *Du débarquement Africain au meurtre de Darlan* (Paris, 1949), pp. 112–14.

[74] Search in the records of the President at the White House and Hyde Park, New York, of the Department of State, and the U.S. Army, and inquiries to Mr. Murphy, Miss Constance Harvey (then U.S. Vice-Consul at Lyons), Admiral William D. Leahy (then Ambassador at Vichy), Mr. Douglas MacArthur III, and Mr. S. Pinkney Tuck (then on the embassy staff at Vichy) have failed to elicit a trace of any communication between Giraud and President Roosevelt which could have received the President's written "O.K." A photostatic copy of the document in Giraud's own papers shows it to be a copy of a telegram in his own handwriting rather than the original, if such there be.

[75] (1) Interv, Marcel Vigneras with Gen Giraud, 10 Nov 48. (2) Giraud, *Un seul but: la victoire*, pp. 16–22. (3) CinC AF Diary, 7–8 Nov 42.

The Climax of the Preparations

The first transports bound for Algiers entered the Mediterranean on the night of 5–6 November and, fully visible, slipped silently past Gibraltar, from which the operation was to be directed.[76] Deep within the Rock, in damp and limited quarters excavated during the previous year, General Eisenhower, Commander in Chief, Allied Force, and his principal staff, who flew from the United Kingdom to Gibraltar on 5 and 6 November in B–17's, set up an advanced command post. With General Eisenhower were his deputy commander in chief, General Clark (U.S.), his naval commander in chief, Admiral Cunningham (Br.), his air officer, Air Commodore A. P. Sanders (Br.), the commanders of the two major air elements, General Doolittle (U.S.), and Air Marshal Welsh (Br.), the commanding general of the force which would push eastward from Algeria into Tunisia, General Anderson (Br.), and others. General Eisenhower was nominally in command of Gibraltar's fortress.

Material which British and Canadian tunnelers had excavated from the Rock had been used to extend the landing strip on Gibraltar's airfield into the Bay of Algeçiras. Aircraft which in recent weeks had been brought in crates and assembled now stood wing to wing cramming the field. Gibraltar's harbor gave temporary refuge to oilers, tugs, refueling warships, and other varied craft. Such unusual activity did not pass unobserved by the Axis agents on Spanish soil adjacent to airfield and harbor. But where and in what strength the Allies were preparing to strike, and just when the operation would begin, they could only surmise.

In the Rock, also, was the signal communications center for the imminent operation. The advanced headquarters was linked with London and Washington, with Tangier and a secret American radio network in French North Africa, and with the vessels of the great naval task forces and their protecting groups. Once the ships could terminate their radio silence, a cascade of messages would be added to the stream already inundating the center of Gibraltar.

Important developments were taking place elsewhere. En route to Gibraltar from southern France, in a British submarine which had been put temporarily under American command, and which was out of communication with Gibraltar for over twenty-four hours because of a defective radio transmitter, was General Giraud.[77] In Algiers, General Mast's organization was sending warnings to Oran and Casablanca and preparing for its own local operations. Mr. Robert Murphy was reporting a conference with General Juin to which he had been invited earlier that day.[78] The French commander in chief had discussed the possibility of Allied aid against the threatening Axis initiative in Tunisia. He had warned Murphy that a recent visit to French North and West Africa by Admiral Darlan had

[76] (1) For the planned schedule from D minus 8 to D plus 33, see: Memo, Gen Lemnitzer for Gen and Spec Staff Secs AFHQ, 31 Oct 42, sub: Program of events and control of opns from AFHQ Adv Hq. (2) CinC AF Diary, 5 Nov 42.

[77] Reports of the submarine journey, Operation MINERVA, appear in the following sources: (1) Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch," App. B3. (2) Memo, Capt Jerauld Wright, for Comdr USN Forces in Europe, 7 Dec 42, sub: Rpt on Opn MINERVA. AFHQ AG 370.2–53, Micro Job 24, Reel 79D. The three companions of General Giraud were Capt. André Beaufre, Lt. de vaisseau Hubert Viret, and Aspirant Bernard Giraud, the general's son.

[78] Msg, Murphy to Secy of State Cordell Hull for WD, 5 Nov 42. Copy in OPD 336 Sec 2, Case 22.



GIBRALTAR, *looking toward the Bay of Algeciras.*

brought about no change in the standing defense instructions: if the Allies should invade before the Axis forces did, Juin would be compelled to order that they be opposed; if the Allies would only wait, they could be welcomed and assisted.

The Allies' leadership had just been somewhat flustered by the sudden insistence of General Mast's group, through Murphy, that the Allied landings be postponed for three weeks to permit them to make adequate preparations. The proposal had been rejected as wholly impracticable.[79] Now General Juin's counsel of delay also had to be ignored. The assaulting force was mounted and moving on an inexorable, predetermined course. The months of planning and preparing were almost at an end.

[79] (1) Msg 749, Algiers to Gen Handy for Adm Leahy, 31 Oct 42. Copy in WDCSA 381 TORCH (11-1-42) Sec II. (2) Msg 4373, London to AGWAR, 1 Nov 42. ETOUSA Outgoing Cables, Kansas City Rcds Ctr. (3) Memo, Marshall for Leahy and King; Memo, President for JCS, 2 Nov 42; Msg, Field Marshal Dill to COS, 2 Nov 42, JSM 455. Copies in WDCSA 381 TORCH Sec 2.

PART TWO

THE AMPHIBIOUS PHASE ON THE ATLANTIC COAST

CHAPTER V

The French Decide To Fight

Operation TORCH had two major phases. The first, amphibious landings, included widely separated operations on the Atlantic coast of Morocco and on the Mediterranean shores of western and central Algeria. The second phase was an overland advance through eastern Algeria into Tunisia, supplemented by the consolidation of each of the three task forces near Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers, and by the increase of air strength at the newly acquired French airdromes. The amphibious phase was to be conducted against such resistance as the French might choose to offer in spite of extraordinary efforts by the Allies to avert it. The second phase would begin while the French deliberated over joining the Allies in active opposition to the Axis powers or remaining passively neutral.

The amphibious landings were all to begin in the predawn hours of 8 November; the hostilities which ensued, as will later appear, were concluded successively in Algiers, Oran, and Casablanca.[1] Although D Day was the same for all, H Hour was a matter of discretion with each task force commander, for with more than 700 airline miles intervening between Casablanca and Algiers, the conditions of tide, moonlight, wind, and sunrise at these widely separated beaches would vary. The commanders were free to delay after 0100 in order to grasp favorable conditions, rather than under compulsion to meet a precise over-all schedule regardless of the immediate situation. The Eastern and Center Naval Task Forces adopted 0100, Greenwich time; the Western Task Force planned for 0400.[2]

The landing forces expected to be put ashore by American methods off Morocco and by British methods off Algeria. The Western Naval Task Force intended, within the limits imposed by its incomplete and hurried training for such an undertaking, to anchor the troop transports in a designated area several miles offshore and to release the landing craft which had been swinging from their davits. These boats would then assemble alongside certain ships to take aboard the troops, temporarily organized into boat teams. Once loaded, the boats would circle until time to assemble in waves at a line of departure between two control vessels. From that line they would proceed in formation and on schedule toward shore, escorted by guiding vessels equipped with radar and other navigational aids. No preliminary bombardment was to

[1] In this part of the narrative, and in the section which follows, the geographical pattern of Allied advance from west to east has been allowed to prevail over a strictly chronological pattern, with an account of first the operations of the Western, then of the Center, and lastly of the Eastern landing forces.

[2] (1) Outline Plan, TORCH, 8 Oct 42, par. 4. OPD 381 TORCH. (2) WTF Final Rpt, Operations TORCH, Vol. II. DRB AGO. (3) CTF FO 1, 4 Oct 42, par. 2; EAF FO 1, 4 Oct 42.

soften resistance at the beachhead, but fire support ships would take stations from which to shell targets ashore as required. The waves of landing craft would go in at intervals which allowed each wave to unload and retract from the beach in time to make room for the wave behind it. The first troops to land were to capture the beach and prepare it to receive succeeding waves. Later arrivals would reconnoiter inland, expand the beachhead, and penetrate the interior to reach special objectives. After being unloaded and withdrawn from the beaches, the landing craft were to be guided back for later loads according to a schedule which would bring them alongside various transports rather than only to their own parent ships. After daylight the transports could be brought in closer or taken out farther to sea, depending on the progress of operations ashore and the enemy's ability to retaliate.

The fast convoy approaching the Strait of Gibraltar from the United Kingdom had been practically unobserved, the only warning being an unconfirmed report on 2 November from the German submarine *U–514* of seven large ships, probably transports, moving eastward toward the Mediterranean.[3] The Western Naval Task Force, as already noted, crossed the Atlantic without being detected by either French or Axis reconnaissance. The main indication to the enemy that the Allies were preparing a landing on the Atlantic coast was the extraordinary accumulation of ships and aircraft at Gibraltar in October and nearly November, a process interpreted to mean that an attack might be imminent at Dakar as well as inside the Mediterranean.[4] The convoys which were observed passing into the Mediterranean through the Strait of Gibraltar and which were kept under enemy air observation at fairly frequent intervals on 6 and 7 November attracted much attention, but Admiral Hewitt's convoy succeeded in keeping out of sight until after nightfall. It then sped to the three major areas from which its attack on French Morocco was to be launched. Thus, off Safi, Fedala, and Mehdia, the three naval attack groups carrying the sub-task forces under General Patton's command were taking their positions as D Day arrived.

French military forces in the Casablanca defense sector had been allowed to relax the state of readiness during the evening of 7 November, but the events of the early morning were to bring about a general alert throughout French Morocco. These warnings seem to have been instigated not by receipt of reports from Algiers or Oran, or by the recorded broadcast to the French people from the President transmitted from London, but rather by the efforts of the pro-Allied French in Casablanca to forestall resistance to the landings. For these men had been actively at work to help bring about a peaceful occupation of western Morocco.[5] The few Americans engaged for well over a year in preparing for such events awaited the arrival of the Western Task Force with mounting excitement. They heard the British Broadcasting Corpora-

[3] *Seekriegsleitung/1.Abt* (hereafter referred to as *SKL/1.Abt*) *KTB, Teil A, 1.–30.XI.42,* 8 Nov 42.

[4] Msg, *OKW/WFSt Nr. 551768/42* to *German General, Rome,* and others, 17 Oct 42 in *DWStK, Chefsachen, 1941–1943.*

[5] (1) Rpt, Maj Deuve to CG Marrakech Div and Safi–Mogador Sector, 14 Nov 42, sub: Opns for 8–9 Nov 42. Copy in transl in WTF Final Rpt, G–2 Annex, Item 12. (2) Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations,* II, 68–71.



EN ROUTE TO NORTH AFRICA, *26 October 1942.*

tion's warning signal, "Robert arrive," shortly after sundown on 7 November. The U.S. Consul General, H. Earle Russell, was informed by one of his staff that landings were being made in Algeria and would begin on the west Moroccan coast at 0500, local time (0400, Greenwich time), on 8 November. President Roosevelt's notes to the Sultan of Morocco and to the Resident General, which were to be delivered in Rabat, more than fifty miles away, were entrusted to two vice-consuls with directions to present them as soon as the landings were in progress.[6] A secret radio station ("Lincoln") was in operation on the roof of a building not far from the port with an alternative apparatus at another point in case of emergency, and with storage batteries at hand to use when the city's electric power should be cut off. Waiting in a small shelter near his instruments was the French operator ("Ajax"). A messenger linked the operator with the consulate, where Vice-Consul W. Stafford Reid encoded and decoded messages. All radio contact with the approaching force was channeled by specific orders through Gibraltar. Unwillingness of the operator at Gibraltar to adopt the procedures which the operator at Casablanca deemed necessary in the light of experience, rendered contact imperfect, particularly at night.[7]

[6] Rpt, Russell to Secy of State, 12 Nov 42, sub: Occupation of Casablanca by Amer troops. Copy in OCMH.

[7] Jnl and Rpt, Ajax to Reid, 22 Nov 42. In private possession.

All arrangements for sabotage, seizure of key points, and capture of leading Vichyites and German Control Commissioners in Morocco, which had been so long in preparation by French civilian groups organized by Vice-Consul David W. King, were set aside by an order from Mr. Robert Murphy in Algiers, scarcely three days earlier. This step transferred complete control to General Béthouart, commanding general of the Casablanca Division. King issued instructions on 7 November for a forty-eight-hour practice alert which would place his civilian groups in position to act when they discovered that the invasion was actually taking place, but even these orders failed to reach Port-Lyautey until much too late. General Béthouart, acting for the organization headed by General Mast and others in Algiers, was expected to prevent resistance by the French forces ashore and to expedite an association in arms with the Allies against the Axis powers. He planned to seize temporary control at Rabat by a military coup, then to order the garrisons along the coast to remain in their barracks while the landings were executed, and to hold potential reinforcements at their interior stations.[8]

French military plans for defending Morocco were elaborate and well established. They had been brought up to date by a series of directives from Gen. Georges Lascroux, Commander in Chief of Moroccan Troops, dated 19 August 1942.[9] The western coast from Spanish Morocco to Rio de Oro was divided by these plans into four sectors, of which all but the most southerly were within the objective attacked by the Western Task Force. These three sectors, from north to south, were headed respectively by the Commanding General, Meknès Division (Maj. Gen. André Dody); the vice admiral commanding Moroccan Naval Forces (Vice Adm. François Michelier); and the Commanding General, Marrakech (Maj. Gen. Henri Martin). Garrisons and auxiliary troops, which were normally stationed at various points within each area, were to be concentrated as needed in order to reinforce the defenders of the ports. Defense in depth for approximately fifty miles along routes to the interior was also planned.

Three sections of mobile reserves were available inland under the control of the theater commander (the Resident General), one group to assemble near Khemisset, a second, near Settat, and the third, a light armored brigade, in the Boulhaut–Marchand area. On the north, protection of the frontier between the French and Spanish protectorates was furnished mainly by garrisons controlled from Oujda and Guercif. Auxiliary native troops from the interior would be used either on the northern front or, eventually, on the western coast if that proved necessary.

Although the plans were primarily designed for the repulse of enemy forces pressing toward the interior from the west or north, they were also arranged with a view to defending firmly the Moroccan capital, Rabat, by a particularly large proportion of the available strength.

The Center Attack Group was just arriving off Fedala as General Béthouart sped past that town en route to Rabat to take there the first critical overt steps in his projected military coup. At 0200, he sent a letter to General Noguès in which he ex-

[8] (1) Interv with King, 24 Feb 48. (2) TORCH Anthology, Africa, Rpt 10,207 (rpt by King). CIA OSS Archives. (3) Gen. Émile Béthouart, The Occurrences of 8 November in Morocco. Copy in OCMH.

[9] Journal of Actions of the High Command of Moroccan Troops, 8–11 Nov 42. Copy in transl in WTF Final Rpt, G–2 Annex, Item 11. The journal identifies the directives as 773/OP3.

plained that General Giraud, aided by American troops, was taking command in all French North Africa and had designated General Béthouart both to take command in Morocco over all Army troops and to assist an American expedition about to land there. General Noguès was also apprised of the fact that orders were being issued to all Moroccan garrisons and airdromes not to oppose the landings. He was asked either to issue confirming orders or, if he preferred, to absent himself until he could simply accept a *fait accompli*.[10]

While this letter, with accompanying documents, was being delivered at the Residency, General Béthouart proceeded to the command post of the Moroccan Army headquarters. He was protected there by a battalion of Colonial Moroccan Infantry, recruited chiefly from young men who had escaped from France hoping to resume the war against the Axis, soldiers to whom the current mission was congenial. General Lascroux, whose post General Béthouart was assuming, was sent to Meknès under nominal duress. General Lahoulle, commanding French air forces in Morocco, agreed not to resist the landing if the ground forces also refrained. When he tried by telephone to persuade Admiral Michelier to adopt the same policy, and was induced instead to reverse his own stand, he too was placed under arrest. Orders to keep all planes grounded were issued to the air bases.[11]

In Casablanca, at the Admiralty, General Béthouart's chief of staff, Lt. Col. Eugene Molle, handed to Admiral Michelier a letter from General Béthouart similar in character to that sent to General Noguès. The recently arrived admiral, commander of all French naval units in Morocco and commander in chief of the Casablanca defense sector, was urged to join the elements under General Giraud in receiving the Americans without resistance as a preliminary to joint action against the Axis.[12] The American consular staff in Casablanca had had ample grounds for believing that the upper grades in the French naval establishment there were pro-Axis. For the American task force to occupy Casablanca and subsidiary ports unmolested, the French naval commander would have to issue orders of unmistakable force and clarity.

The situation placed Admiral Michelier under the necessity of making a critical choice. His responsibilities were large. The standing orders for defense charged him, as Naval Commander in Chief in Morocco, with defense against an enemy afloat, and, as the immediate commander of the Casablanca defense sector, with the employment of sea, air, and ground forces against landing parties. Only when the success of an invading force required commitment of the general reserves would the command over defensive operations pass from Admiral Michelier to General Noguès as Commander of the Moroccan Theater of Operations. The unity of command over all armed elements was thus arranged in a sector extending inland for fifty miles in order to prevent a transfer of leadership at the critical point of an attack when an enemy

[10] General Noguès furnished an account to his staff of the events of 8–11 November 1942 which appears in WTF Final Rpt, G–2 Annex, Item 11, 23 Dec 42. In replies to queries by the author, dated 28 January 1950 and 23 January 1951, General Noguès described Béthouart's documents concerning Giraud and American action as unauthenticated by signature and of doubtful reliability.

[11] General Béthouart has written a detailed and trustworthy account of his actions: The Occurrences of 8 November in Morocco, cited above, n. 8.

[12] Béthouart, The Occurrences of 8 November in Morocco.



LANDING CRAFT CIRCLING NEAR A TROOP TRANSPORT *until time to assemble in waves for the run to shore, 8 November 1942.*

began establishing his foothold ashore. Permanent, detailed instructions for all echelons had been issued, instructions to be enforced automatically in case of attack, whoever the aggressor might be. The mechanism of defense could be stopped only by very positive intervention. When the Admiral received Béthouart's message, he scouted the possibility that the Americans could land a force during the night capable of holding any of the ports under his protection. The weather, the surf, and the failure of his coastal air or submarine patrols to detect the Western Naval Task Force within cruising distance of the shore before darkness—all seemed to warrant disbelief. He therefore decided that General Béthouart was the victim of a hoax, and assured General Noguès and others by telephone at intervals during the night that no large force was offshore.[13]

Admiral Michelier directed the assistant commander of the Casablanca Division, Brig. Gen. Raymond Desré, to cancel General Béthouart's orders holding the unit immobilized and, instead, to place its components where the standing orders prescribed. By 0300, the Americans in the consulate observed truckloads of soldiers, a stream of little "Citroëns," and many motorcycles and bicycles hastening through the city toward the port and coastal batteries.[14]

The choice before General Noguès, when he received General Béthouart's letter and found the Residency surrounded by insubordinate forces, depended directly upon the nature of the impending attack. He might have been placed in command of Moroccan defensive operations by direction of General

[13] Ltr, Noguès to author, 28 Jan 50, notes on American landings in Morocco.

[14] (1) Béthouart, The Occurrences of 8 November in Morocco. (2) W. Stafford Reid, Torchlight before Dawn. Unpublished memoirs in private possession.

Juin, who was his superior in such matters, and who was at the time, along with Admiral Darlan, under arrest in Algiers. He might have assumed the command on his own initiative had he recognized that the magnitude of the American forces about to land required the commitment of reserves from the interior stations. He could not have countermanded Admiral Michelier's orders to the crews of the coastal batteries and the units of the Casablanca Division along the coast without being *"dissident."* The most which could have been expected by those who knew him, in view of his determination to keep French Morocco from German military occupation and of his professional concern with the discipline of the French Army, was a course leading to token resistance.[15] Casualties might have been held to a minimum while at least an appearance of defense was being created. French failure to resist an American attack by forces manifestly weak and insufficient to control French Morocco, or any Commando raid of the hit-and-run variety, could not fail to cause Axis reprisals. Whether General Noguès assumed control with a view to confining French resistance to "token" proportions or allowed the Casablanca defense sector to resist manfully under Admiral Michelier's direction would depend directly on the size of the American invading expedition.

With these considerations in mind, and before replying to General Béthouart's letter, General Noguès began a cautious appraisal of the situation and ordered a general alert.[16] The naval authorities denied the presence of large forces offshore. The landings did not begin at the time announced by General Béthouart, nor did any American force arrive at Rabat. By telephone General Noguès communicated with the commanders of the Meknès and Marrakech military sectors and ascertained that they remained subordinate to his authority rather than accepting the leadership of General Béthouart, as the latter had claimed. President Roosevelt's note to General Noguès was delivered considerably later than the plans called for, and was laid aside unrecognized for a later perusal. Any doubts concerning its authenticity might have been dispelled if the President's radio broadcast had been heard by the Resident General, but by the time the document was read the size and strength of the landings were apparent.

General Noguès finally replied to General Béthouart by telephone after planes had strafed the antiaircraft batteries at Rabat and the airdromes at Casablanca, Salé, and Port-Lyautey, after ground troops had seized Safi and Fedala, and after naval gunfire had silenced the principal batteries near both ports. He then knew that fighting was also occurring at Oran and Algiers and that General Giraud had not been generally accepted as the leader in North Africa. He ordered General Béthouart to dismiss the protective battalion of Moroccan Colonials at once. To avoid bloodshed within the army, Béthouart and his principal associates sent away the guard and went to the Residency. There they were kept in custody until evening and then sent to Meknès to stand trial for treason.[17]

[15] Ltr, Noguès to author, 28 Jan 50.

[16] (1) *Ibid.*, Ltr, Noguès to author, 23 Jan 51. (2) Béthouart, The Occurrences of 8 November in Morocco. (3) Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, pp. 112–251.

[17] Ltrs, Gen Nogués to author, 28 Jan 50 and 23 Jan 51; Rpt, Consul Gen Russell to Secy of State, 12 Nov 42, sub: Occupation of Casablanca by Amer troops Béthouart, The Occurrences of 8 November in Morocco.

In Casablanca just after 0630, leaflets containing General Eisenhower's proclamation showered down over the city. An hour later, a cordon of guards ringed the U.S. Consulate; in the park across the street an antiaircraft battery was set up; and the air battle against Cazes airfield opened. Col. William H. Wilbur, a member of Patton's staff, had the mission of persuading the commanders in the city to co-operate with the Americans. But by 0800 as he arrived at the Admiralty after a trip in a small car that bore a huge flag of truce, the big guns on El Hank, on the *Jean Bart,* and on other ships in the harbor had opened fire against Admiral Hewitt's Covering Group. Shells from the *Massachusetts,* the *Wichita,* and the *Tuscaloosa* began to fall in the harbor in reply. Soon the port area was blanketed with smoke which rolled in over the city.[18] Hostilities had come to Morocco in a manner perhaps determined at Vichy but certainly attributable to the resolute French admiral at Casablanca and accepted by the Resident General at Rabat. The latter assumed command later in the morning and announced that a state of siege prevailed throughout French Morocco.[19]

[18] Reid, Torchlight before Dawn. Unpublished memoirs in private possession.

[19] Journal of Actions of the High Command of Moroccan Troops, 8–11 Nov. 42. Copy in transl in WTF Final Report, G–2 Annex, Item 11.

CHAPTER VI

Taking Safi

The capture of Safi, where the medium tanks of the Western Task Force were to be landed, opened the attack in Morocco. At about 0600, 7 November, the Southern Attack Group carrying the Safi landing force split from the main convoy of the Western Naval Task Force and headed toward its objective.[1] In midafternoon, while the remainder of the convoy zigzagged, the transport *Lyon* dropped astern with the destroyer-transports *Bernadou* and *Cole* and in about two hours transferred to them by means of landing craft the bulk of companies K and L, 47th Infantry. These men, especially trained, were to be the first to land.[2]

Half an hour before midnight, the transports and warships began to enter their assigned areas about eight miles offshore, and soon the column came to a stop. (The *Santee* remained about sixty miles from the coast, guarded by two destroyers, during the next four days.) Safi's lights were visible on the horizon as preparations for the landings began at once. Troops were alerted. Boats were lowered. Debarkation nets went over the sides. The landing craft were loaded. But in the black darkness, the complicated process of debarkation advanced less rapidly than had been contemplated in the plan of attack and made improvisation necessary.

The Objective and Its Defenses

To the men who were about to land, Safi remained until daylight as they had seen it pictured on maps and photographs, or described in field orders and operations plans. They knew it to be a small town (about 25,000) near an artificial harbor which had been used in recent years principally for the export of phosphates. (*Map 1*) The harbor was a triangular area of protected water sheltered on the east by the shore, on the west by a long jetty extending northwesterly from the shore for a distance of almost a mile, and on the north by a mole (phosphate pier) which projected westward about 300 yards at right angles to the shore. The gap between the tip of the mole and the jetty was the harbor entrance, an opening about 500 feet in width. Within

[1] Led by the old battleship *New York* and the light cruiser *Philadelphia,* it included the escort aircraft carrier *Santee,* eight destroyers, four transports, one cargo ship, the seatrain, two old modified destroyer-transports, an oil tanker, one mine layer, two mine sweepers, and a tug.

[2] The documentary records of the amphibious and land operations in taking Safi are assembled in the following: (1) CTG 34.10 War Diary and Action Rpt, Operation TORCH: Assault on Safi, French Morocco, 8 Nov 42. This includes reports of the *Philadelphia, Mervine, Knight, Beatty, Merrimack, Harris, Lyon, Lakehurst,* and *Calvert.* (2) WTF Final Rpt, Operations TORCH, with annexes. DRB AGO. Of especial value is Annex 1, Final Rpt Opns BLACKSTONE. This section is based primarily on those records. (3) See also Maj James Y. Adams, AGF Obsr's Rpt, 7 Jan 43. Copy in AGF 319.1 (For. Obs), Binder 1, Tab 8.



SAFI HARBOR *(looking east), 10 November 1942. The ships, left to right, are USS* Dix, Calvert, Harris, Lyon, *and* Housatonic.

this harbor triangle were several mooring places for ships with drafts of as much as thirty feet, and in the southernmost angle, the Petite Darse as it was called, were slips for shallower draft fishing boats. The merchandise quay at the northeastern corner provided berths for at least three large vessels. Electric cranes were available there for loading operations. The wharves had access to covered sheds and to space for considerable open storage, and were connected by spur tracks to a railroad leading to the interior. Near this corner, also, was a 100-foot lighthouse tower.

South of the artificial harbor and the new buildings in its vicinity was the old fishing town of Safi, which extended along the coastal shelf and at a break in the bluffs up the easier slopes to a rolling tableland. The native city was nearest the sea at a point where a small stream entered it. Not far from the clifflike waterfront was the tower of an old Portuguese fort of masonry in the crenelated style of the late Middle Ages. On the hillside 750 yards to the east was the Army barracks, and about 2,200 yards farther inland, an emergency landing field for aircraft.

Safi's beaches were few and, for the most part, lay at the base of high, steep, and rocky bluffs which allowed no exit for vehicles. Within the harbor, however, near the Petite Darse was a short stretch of soft sand, rising rather rapidly to the coastal shelf, which was designated as GREEN Beach. Just outside the harbor, extending northward from the mole for almost 500 yards was a longer strip of sand called BLUE



SAFI HARBOR *(looking west), afternoon of D Day. Photograph taken from the tableland above harbor mouth.*

Beach. A third patch of sand ran for a somewhat shorter distance along the base of the cliffs northwest of BLUE Beach; it was called RED Beach. Approaches to RED and BLUE Beaches were exposed to the surf. Passage inland from them was possible for vehicles only from the southernmost portion of BLUE Beach. The last of the beaches at which landings might have been made was eight miles south of the harbor, at Jorf el Houdi, below rugged but not insurmountable bluffs and near a road. It was labeled YELLOW Beach and considered during the planning as a possible point of landing from which to march on Safi from the south. Its approaches were to be reconnoitered by submarine in time to be reported to the subtask force commander during the first hours after arriving off Safi. Should the report be favorable, the 2d Battalion Landing Team, 47th Infantry, would be sent there while other units were striking farther north.

At Safi the invaders expected to find a garrison of over 1,000 men. The force actually there was smaller than that, consisting of one battalion of infantry, one armored battalion equipped with fifteen obsolete light tanks and five armored cars, and two batteries of artillery, one with four 75-mm. howitzers and the other four 155-mm. mobile guns. There were coastal guns on Pointe de la Tour and on the tableland above the harbor mouth. Air support could be summoned from inland airdromes and ground reinforcements from Marrakech, at least ninety-four miles away, and possibly from other points. In fact, road and railway connections with Marrakech alone might,



LA RAILLEUSE, POINTE DE LA TOUR. *Three of the four 130-mm. guns in fixed circular emplacements are visible.*

if undisturbed, bring to the Safi area within ten hours about 1,400 cavalry, 2,000 infantry, two battalions of horse-drawn guns, and, in even less time, thirty tanks and ten armored cars.[3]

The warnings which spread across French Morocco reached Safi shortly after 0320 (local time). The commanding officer at Safi, Major Deuve, started promptly for his command post, a small group of buildings on the rolling tableland just above the port known as the Front de Mer. While the invading force was organizing for landings, he confirmed the readiness of his slender defenses to resist what might come to Safi. An actual total of some 450 officers and men manned the following:

(1) At the Front de Mer, two exposed 75-mm. guns operated by naval crews and defended with automatic arms from surrounding rifle pits.

(2) On the Pointe de la Tour, a headland less than a mile above RED Beach, a coastal battery known as La Railleuse which consisted of two operable and two inoperable 130-mm. guns in fixed circular emplacements, with a modern range finder and fire control apparatus. The guns had a reputed range of 19,000 yards. They were themselves protected by four .50-caliber antiaircraft machine guns and barbed wire barriers. They were manned by naval crews and defended by part of the 104th (Coastal

[3] WTF G–2 Rpt, 12 Sep 42.

TABLE 1—PERSONNEL AND VEHICLES ASSIGNED TO FORCE "X" (BLACKSTONE), AS OF 22 OCTOBER 1942

Unit	Personnel			Vehicles
	Total	Officers	Enlisted	
TOTAL	6,428	327	6,101	779
9th Infantry Division				
1st BLT, 47th Infantry [a]	1,422	51	1,371	127
2d BLT, 47th Infantry [b]	1,423	51	1,372	132
Headquarters, 47th Infantry	339	39	300	44
Other 47th Infantry Troops	966	39	927	79
Armored Landing Team				
2d Battalion (reinforced), 67th Armored Regiment	889	39	850	150
Headquarters, Combat Command B, 2d Armored Division	34	10	24	7
Armored Team on Seatrain				
3d Battalion (reinforced), 67th Armored Regiment	255	16	239	189
Armored Team Combat Support Troops	744	34	710	10
Other Force "X" Personnel				
Detachment of				
Air Force Air Support Party	11	2	9	2
1st Armored Signal Battalion	27	1	26	5
122d Signal Company (Radio Intelligence)	26	1	25	4
142d Signal Company	92	4	88	18
163d Signal Company (Photographic)	6	1	5	1
239th Signal Company (Operational)	27	1	26	5
66th Engineer Company (Topographic)	5	0	5	0
56th Medical Battalion	71	2	69	0
Headquarters, 2d Armored Division	45	13	32	6
Interpreters	24	16	8	0
Prisoner Interrogation Teams	20	5	15	0
Civil Government Personnel	2	2	0	0

[a] Including 4th Platoon, Battery A, 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion.
[b] Including 5th Platoon, Battery A, 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion.

Source: Annex A (Troop List) to Memo, TF "A" to ACofS OPD, 22 Oct 42. Order of Battle TF "A" 1942, St. Louis Rcds.

Defense) Company of the 2d Moroccan Infantry Regiment, most of whom remained on the alert in a neighboring village.

(3) In a prepared position on high ground south of the town, next to the town's European cemetery, a battery of four 75-mm. pieces operated by the 2d Regiment of the Foreign Legion.

(4) Approximately two miles south of the town and a half mile inland from the shore, a mobile battery of three tractor-drawn 155-mm. guns in a well-camouflaged position.

(5) Beside the Public Garden, a platoon of light tanks.

The 5th Company of the 2d Moroccan Infantry Regiment quickly sent forward a picket platoon and moved to positions from which to resist landings in and about the harbor.

The Plan of Attack

The Safi landing force (designated Sub-Task Force BLACKSTONE) [4] numbered 327 officers and 6,101 enlisted men, commanded by Maj. Gen. Ernest N. Harmon, Commanding General, 2d Armored Division. The force was organized into two battalion landing teams (BLT's) for amphibious assault, with part of one infantry battalion in reserve; one armored landing team for early commitment with one medium tank battalion in reserve; a small medical unit, several specialized signal detachments, interpreters and interrogators of prisoners of war; and miscellaneous other detachments.

The light tanks attached to the two BLT's came from Company B, 70th Tank Battalion (Separate). The Armored Landing Team consisted of elements of the 2d and 3d Battalions, 67th Armored Regiment (thirty-six light and fifty-four medium tanks), supported by two batteries of self-propelled 105-mm. howitzers, a provisional bridge company, signal and supply detachments—all from the 2d Armored Division. The sub-task force commander took his staff and headquarters from that division, as did Brig. Gen. Hugh J. Gaffey, who controlled the Armored Landing Team through Headquarters, Combat Command B, and a detachment from Headquarters, 67th Armored Regiment.

The main purpose in taking Safi was to get the medium tanks ashore to use as needed. The forthcoming operation was expected to fall into four major phases. First the port must be brought under control by seizing the docks and preventing sabotage, and by clearing the enemy from a deep beachhead around it. Next, the armored elements on the transport *Titania* and the medium tanks on the seatrain *Lakehurst* had to be brought ashore and assembled for combat. Third, the line of communication had to be made secure for a northward advance. Lastly, the armored force, in particular, had to hasten overland toward Casablanca using bridges over the Oum er Rbia river which must be secured as early as possible. To control the port and establish the beachhead, artillery batteries had to be neutralized and captured, machine gun positions cleared, the garrison subdued, and the arrival of French ground reinforcements or delivery of a serious air attack prevented by defended roadblocks and by supporting air cover.

After reconnaissance, the assault was scheduled to open with surprise landings in the harbor itself from the *Bernadou* and the *Cole*. Following the latter from the line of departure, 3,500 yards offshore, at intervals of not more than 50 feet so as to keep each other in sight, were to come a wave of five light tanks for GREEN Beach and three successive waves of infantry intended for Beaches BLUE, RED, and GREEN respectively. The trip in was to take from thirteen to sixteen minutes. Three more assault waves were to wait at the line of departure, the first two to be sent in by the control vessel at proper intervals and the last to remain in floating reserve until summoned from shore. First light was expected at 0536 and sunrise at 0700. The time for starting the run to shore was therefore set for 0330.

Debarkation Begins

Debarkation from the transports waiting off Safi proved more difficult than had been anticipated. Matters were complicated by the fact that, even before the men began shifting from the transports to landing craft,

[4] See Table 1.

events did not go according to plan. After darkness had fallen on 7 November, the U.S. submarine *Barb* took station some two and one-half miles from Pointe de la Tour and disembarked a detachment of Army scouts from the 47th Infantry to row in a rubber boat to the end of the long jetty, there to mark the harbor entrance by infrared signals in order to help the *Bernadou* and the *Cole*. In complete darkness, they entered the harbor before they discovered their exact whereabouts and were obliged to take shelter from the fire of sentries. The submarine, however, started continuous infrared signaling from its station.

While landing craft were being loaded alongside the transports, a scout boat from the transport *Harris* commanded by Ensign John J. Bell, started in at 0200 carrying orders to the special landing groups on the *Bernadou* and *Cole* to execute the attack plan, and with instructions to obtain from the submarine a written report of its reconnaissance of YELLOW Beach. The submarine's signals could not be seen.[5] Ensign Bell therefore reported to the commanders of the *Bernadou* and the *Cole* that he would himself take a position off the tip of the jetty to assist their approach. He neared the harbor at minimum speed, cutting his motor every fifteen minutes and listening as he drifted. At 0410, as he neared the spot from which to guide the incoming *Bernadou,* he saw the lights at the end of the jetty go out, and from the general direction of Pointe de la Tour, barely descried the destroyer-transport nearing the harbor mouth. Its infrared light was visible. Ensign Bell turned on his own.

The 1st Battalion Landing Team (BLT), 47th Infantry (Maj. Frederick C. Feil), disembarked from the *Harris* while the harbor entrance was being marked and the two destroyer-transports were getting into position to enter the port. The *Harris'* twenty-eight landing craft were lowered by 0035 hours, while twenty-one more boats from the *Lyon* and the *Calvert,* were on the way. Those from the *Lyon* had difficulty finding the *Harris* and were late. Unloading operations in the darkness fell behind the appointed schedule, necessitating a delay of thirty minutes in the entire program. The vehicles and guns of the first wave of artillery had been loaded in three holds on the fourth deck of the *Harris;* to extract them, heavy vehicles had to be shifted and nine hatches had to be opened. The troops, moreover, weighed down with sixty-pound packs and weapons, crawled deliberately down the debarkation nets.[6]

The limited training and experience of the Western Naval Task Force showed at this juncture. Getting the assigned landing craft to ship's side and lowering tanks, vehicles, ammunition, and equipment in the heavy swell proved unexpectedly difficult. Only four out of five tank lighters for the first wave and only the first three personnel waves were loaded from the *Harris* and sent to the rendezvous area off its port bow in time for the delayed H Hour. The other

[5] The submarine remained until firing by friendly ships forced it to submerge, and then, shortly after 0600, started for a patrol station southwest of Mogador, out of the attack zone and in the path of any French naval reinforcements from Dakar. Its beach reconnaissance had been completed so near the time of attack as to be of minor value. Its assistance to navigation by the *Bernadou* and *Cole* was superseded by that furnished from the scout boat carrying Ensign Bell. (1) *Barb* Action Rpt, 25 Nov 42. SS220/A16, Ser 026C. (2) TF 34 Opn Plan 4–42, Annex A, Special Instruction for Safi Submarine. Copy in Col Gay Opnl Misc 1942 file, Kansas City Rcds Ctr. (3) Rpt of 1st Lt Willard G. Duckworth, 17 Nov 42, in 47th Inf AAR.

[6] *Harris* Action Rpt, 16 Nov 42.



FIRE CONTROL TOWER *of the 130-mm. battery on Pointe de la Tour. A shell plowed the furrow in the foreground and then ricocheted through the observation slot.*

two waves straggled. The wave of tanks and the three waves of troops started in, nonetheless, from the line of departure at 0400. They were escorted by the destroyers *Mervine* and *Beatty*.

The Battle Opens

The *Beatty* was expected to furnish fire support from an area south of the lanes of approach. It crossed behind the *Bernadou* to reach its position. In the darkness, the *Beatty* was mistaken by those on the *Cole* for the *Bernadou* itself. As the *Bernadou* neared the harbor mouth, the signal "VH" was flashed from the shore. It replied at once with the same signal. Nothing followed from the shore for about fifteen minutes. Then, as the ship passed the north end of the jetty to enter the harbor mouth, the defenders of Safi suddenly poured fire in that direction from the 75-mm. battery at the Front de Mer, from machine guns emplaced along the bluffs and the high ground east of the port, and from rifles on the wharves and jetty. From its hidden position south of Safi, even the 155-mm. battery opened up, and the 130-mm. battery on Pointe de la Tour also began to bombard the transport area. The *Bernadou*'s gunners replied with steady efficiency while the ship continued on her way. A flare with American flag attached was released above the harbor in the hope of moderating the hostile reception; for a brief period it assisted the French gun pointers but had no other effect.

At 0428, when French gun flashes were observed by those on the *Mervine*, her commander gave the code signal for meeting such resistance, "Batter Up!" Her gunners, who had kept their weapons trained on the lights near the coast as the vessel escorted the landing craft toward the shore, responded almost instantly to firing orders with accurate and effective salvos. Only a minute or two later, the *Beatty*'s 5-inch shells also began to strike the area from which French artillery and machine gun fire was coming. At 0438, Admiral Davidson signaled "Play Ball." The *New York* then took under fire the big guns on Pointe de la Tour, smashing the fire control tower with the second salvo of its 14-inch shells. At the same time, the *Philadelphia* shelled the supposed site of the battery to the south. For about ten minutes, fire was heavy, but it diminished as the *Bernadou* drew near shore within the port.

Bearing Company K, 47th Infantry (Capt. Gordon H. Sympson), that old vessel pressed through the opening tempest of both hostile and friendly fire to the narrowing angle of the harbor near its southern limits. Boats at anchor barred quick access to the wharves; so the *Bernadou* made for a small mole between GREEN Beach and the Petite Darse, ran gently upon its rocks, flung over a landing net, and, at approximately 0445, disembarked the first American troops to land in French Morocco. The first men clambered down the net a few feet and hastened along the mole to the positions which they had been trained to take. Others were much more deliberate.

When the *Cole* observed the *Beatty* en route to her fire support position in the darkness and mistook her for the *Bernadou,* she turned southward to follow. Soon Ensign Bell in the scout boat saw her on a course certain to pile her against the jetty. By flashlight and then by voice radio, he signaled barely in time to stop her thirty yards short of a crash. Also by radio, he guided the *Cole* back on a curving course into the harbor.

The tank lighters by this time had cut ahead of her and, although one fell out temporarily with motor trouble, three continued into the harbor to GREEN Beach, arriving there some twenty minutes after the *Bernadou.* The 47th Infantry Reconnaissance Platoon rode with the tanks in these lighters, and, on reaching shore, one section hastened through Company K to the post office to take over the telephone and telegraph central station and to cut communications with the rest of Morocco. They captured some French troops moving toward the port, seized an antitank gun, and disarmed civil police.[7] The *Cole* itself ran through a renewed outburst of machine gun and small arms fire but swung along the merchandise quay. Company L, 47th Infantry (Capt. Thomson Wilson), debarked and swarmed through the dock area, from which the defenders fled, while one American detachment overcame a machine gun crew to take possession of the petroleum storage tanks about 350 yards east of the harbor. At daylight, the harbor, railroad station, post office, and highways entering the city from the south were held by men of the special landing groups. The enemy had taken cover in buildings and other places of vantage on the heights east and north of the port, from which sporadic fire was received well into the afternoon.

The first three waves of the Major Feil's 1st Battalion Landing Team, 47th Infantry, each with more than 200 men in a group of six landing craft personnel, ramp (LCPR's), landed before daylight on RED, BLUE, and GREEN Beaches. The plan to remain close enough for visual contact broke down during the run to shore. Each wave depended on navigation by compass and on the assistance of Ensign Bell's flashlight signals to save itself from fumbling around the harbor entrance until first light. The three waves reached land between 0500 and 0530, largely where they had expected to, and got themselves and their equipment up the beaches against minor resistance from higher ground. Company B and a platoon of Company A, 47th Infantry, pushed inland from Beach RED, but others advanced from Beaches BLUE and GREEN only after about an hour's delay. The fourth and fifth waves, held up

[7] Rpt of 2d Sec Rcn Plat, 8 Nov 42, in 47th Inf AAR. This section was commanded by 1st Lt. J. W. Calton, who had had Commando training.

by various difficulties in debarkation, did not go ashore before daylight.[8]

Daylight revealed to the defenders at the coastal defense guns on Pointe de la Tour the exact location, within easy range, of the transports and the destroyer *Mervine*. They resumed the firing which had been suspended about two hours previously, concentrating on the *Mervine* while the transports hastily moved farther from the shore. The destroyer, replying with its own guns as best it could, by energetic evasion also got out of range, but not until it had been straddled several times and its steering gear injured by a near miss astern. The fourth wave of the 1st BLT, 47th Infantry, started in for BLUE Beach just as the firing began and, passing unscathed under the shellfire, arrived about 0745. The fifth wave was withheld while the *Harris* moved out to sea, and did not land until about 0905. Meanwhile, Ensign Bell's scout boat hurried away from its vulnerable position near the harbor entrance and was sent to assist the landings at YELLOW Beach.

The attempt to send the 2d BLT (Maj. Louis Gershenow) to YELLOW Beach had been thwarted until after daylight. The transport *Dorothea L. Dix,* crowded with approximately 1,450 officers and enlisted men, 5 light tanks, and nearly 1,500 tons of vehicles and other cargo, made hard work of debarkation. Lowering and loading of landing craft in the heavy swell fell considerably behind the schedule. Its scout boat, away in time to take station off YELLOW Beach at 0355, waited there for the destroyer *Knight* to escort the waves of landing craft, but the *Knight* was not ready until after 0500. The destroyer began the eight-mile movement from the transport area with only five imperfectly organized waves of the ten needed to carry the whole landing team. En route, these five lost contact with the destroyer and returned to the transport area; here they circled about, and did not start for YELLOW Beach again until 0800, when La Railleuse had ceased firing.

The abortive first effort of the 2d BLT to reach YELLOW Beach during the last hour of darkness had hardly begun when one of the most disturbing episodes of the Safi landing occurred. A truck being lowered by the *Dix* into an LCV (landing craft, vehicle) was swung heavily against the side by the ship's motion. An extra gasoline can on the truck was crushed, spraying gasoline into the motor of the craft below. There it exploded, igniting the boat, the truck, and the ship's side. Flames flared up brilliantly, silhouetting other vessels in the transport area. On other ships and among troops at the beaches or in landing craft, the belief prevailed that the *Dix* had been torpedoed. This impression was strengthened by exploding ammunition in the burning LCV, which gave the semblance of combat until the craft sank, the noise subsided, and the flaming truck was dropped overboard.

The harbor, the port facilities, and the southern part of Safi were brought under American control by the special landing groups and part of the 47th Infantry Reconnaissance Platoon in less time than it took the 1st BLT to take its objective—the

[8] (1) The first wave consisted of 212 men, a few more than in the second and third, distributed among the following units: Company A, 47th Infantry; 15th Engineers; and 163d Signal Company (Photo). The first wave also contained the following specialists: communications sergeant with SCR–536; shore party beach markers; two light machine gun squads; two 60-mm. mortar squads; four aid men; and two litter bearers. (2) USS *Harris* Action Rpt, 16 Nov 42. (3) 47th Inf Hist, 1 Aug 40–31 Dec 42. (4) Adams, AGF Obsr's Rpt, 7 Jan 43. Copy in AGF 319.1 (For. Obs), Binder 1, Tab 8.

high ground northeast and north of the harbor. The first three waves of the 1st BLT, as already noted, reachd RED, BLUE, and GREEN Beaches against minor resistance, and in darkness. They organized the beaches and prepared to advance inland to the Front de Mer, Pointe de la Tour, and other centers of French resistance. As the light improved, fire from machine guns and concealed riflemen increased. Company C, which landed at 0630, had expected the support of light tanks from GREEN Beach, but these vehicles were delayed for several hours. Only three tank lighters, it will be remembered, reached GREEN Beach together, shortly after the *Bernadou* had arrived there. A fourth lighter straggled in much later after repairing an engine failure which had forced it to drop out of the wave formation. A fifth made the trip from the *Harris* to the beach alone. Once ashore, all the tanks were immobilized by drowned motors, faulty batteries, or by the steep, soft sand. It was after 0800 before they were ready for action. By that time, naval gun fire had silenced the coastal defense guns, and most of the high ground adjacent to the port was in American possession, although enemy riflemen remained concealed on the bluff or in buildings overlooking the harbor. The infantry, after bogging down under fire, were rallied by Col. Edwin H. Randle and moved inland without the tanks to their objectives along the beachhead line. Company D passed through them after landing at BLUE Beach at 0705.

Completing the Seizure of Safi

Deepening the beachhead and clearing a channel for the seatrain *Lakehurst* from the transport area to the harbor were the next operations to be attempted. To assist in the first operation, the remainder of the 3d BLT, 47th Infantry (Maj. John B. Evans), was ordered ashore from the *Lyon* to reinforce the special harbor landing groups as soon as landing craft became available. Disembarkation began at 0755 and the first wave started in at 0903, but the unit was not all ashore and reorganized until about noon.

The 2d BLT began its second attempt to reach YELLOW Beach from the *Dix* just before 0800 and at noon most of the unit was ashore and ready to move upon Safi along the coastal roads. Part of the 2d Battalion was eventually sent directly into the port, where it rejoined those who had by then marched north from YELLOW Beach after setting up roadblocks and blowing up the railroad en route. The Armored Landing Team, whose light tanks and other vehicles were on the *Titania,* while most of its personnel was on the *Calvert,* was ordered at about 0900 to start sending tanks to the beach in lighters. Within an hour, one platoon had cleared GREEN Beach and was bound to Pointe de la Tour to investigate the situation there. In midmorning, General Gaffey, with one more platoon of five tanks, hastened from BLUE Beach to reinforce an infantry team in quelling renewed resistance at the old Portuguese fort. Thereafter, all tanks were unloaded within the harbor from ship to quay.

Before either the 3d BLT from GREEN Beach or the 2d BLT from YELLOW Beach had extended its control over the site of the 155-mm. mobile battery two miles south of Safi, that battery renewed its firing in one final bombardment of Safi harbor. The *Philadelphia's* supporting fire at the opening of the battle seemed at the time to have silenced it, but as the Armored Landing Team began to debark from the *Titania,*

shells believed to come from these large guns made it necessary to neutralize them at once. General Harmon, at 1025, got a call through to the cruiser *Philadelphia* requesting fire on the battery's supposed position. Ten minutes later, while an observation plane helped locate the camouflaged target, the cruiser began dropping salvos of 6-inch shells which finally found their mark. To complete the destruction of the battery, bombers worked over it until a direct hit on one gun was seen. Later investigation indicated that the French had themselves rendered the weapons unusable. After the French shelling ceased, unloading of the tanks was resumed at noon, and when the channel had been swept early in the afternoon, both the seatrain *Lakehurst* and the *Titania* moved to dockside moorings. The *Calvert* and *Lyon* anchored just outside the harbor.

American possession of the main defensive batteries and of the harbor was disputed by harassing small arms fire long after it became imperative, under orders from General Patton, to expedite the unloading. American troops were engaged, for at least an hour after the seatrain docked, in a fire fight in the vicinity of GREEN Beach and along the waterfront streets against a few riflemen concealed in buildings and on the hillsides. Unloading kept stopping as men took cover from whining bullets.

The main center of resistance until mid-afternoon on D Day was the walled French Army barracks area, between the port and the newer part of the town, southeast of the medina. Company K, leaving one platoon at the roadblock on the highway to Mogador, was ordered back at about 0730 to engage the occupants of the barracks, but at the southern limit of the area was pinned down by machine gun and rifle fire. When I Company approached from the northeast, it too was held up. The defenders then tried to counterattack with three light tanks only to have two of them knocked out of service by antitank rifle grenades, while the driver of a third was stunned in colliding with a wall. The tanks were seized and their guns were turned against the barracks. Early in the afternoon, a section of M Company's 81-mm. mortars, commanded by Capt. James D. Johnston, began dropping high explosive shells around the area for two hours while the garrison still held out. In the meantime, Battery A, 84th Field Artillery, got its truck-drawn 75-mm. pieces emplaced above BLUE Beach in a position which commanded both the barracks area and the main thoroughfare to Marrakech. The guns were not employed against the barracks for fear of harming friendly troops, but the area was surrendered anyway at about 1530, 8 November. About that time, General Harmon landed and soon had tank and motorized patrols clearing out the snipers who were harassing the troops unloading supplies in the port. The day's operations, during which Companies C and L in the port area took the most punishment, were almost completed. Safi had been taken.

Almost from the first, civilian natives became a problem to the attacking troops. They gathered in awed crowds to observe the naval shelling; they were disdainfully unafraid of small arms fire. A soldier would snake his way painfully through rocks and rubble to set up a light machine gun, raise his head cautiously to aim, and find a dozen natives clustered solemnly around him. Street intersections were crowded with natives turning their heads like a tennis gallery in trying to watch the exchange of fire. The wounded were poked and jabbered at. An

unfolded map quickly attracted an excited group. During the afternoon, the natives thronged the beaches, unloading landing craft for the price of a cigarette, a can of food, a piece of cloth, plus whatever they could steal. Pilferage they attempted with tireless energy. Two days later tons of ammunition and rations were to be found loaded on native fishing vessels. The theft of weapons was far less frequent. Both civilian and military French officials joined in urging preventive measures to deal with the native propensity for sniping.[9]

Control over the deepening bridgehead eventually gave security to the unloading operations from all serious danger except a retaliatory air strike. The air cover which the *Santee* could offer was extremely weak, for its complement had been hurried into combat while still greatly lacking in experience and training. Admiral Davidson preferred to depend upon the seaplanes of the *New York* and the *Philadelphia.* Since the French air units at Marrakech were reported to be friendly, plans to strike the airfield at dawn on D Day had been canceled, and air action was limited to reconnaissance. French aviation remained quiet until mid-afternoon. Then, at about 1540, and again a little later, a two-engined bomber circled low enough over the harbor to draw anti-aircraft fire from the batteries ashore and from the seatrain. It seemed likely that, before daylight returned next day, Safi would be under French air attack.

When darkness fell on Safi, the beachhead extended about 5,000 yards from the port. All the roads leading into the town were blocked. Traffic entered the city only after all persons had been searched for weapons; no one was allowed to leave. The streets were patrolled. Prisoners of war, eventually to number about 300, were accumulating in a newly organized enclosure. Known Axis collaborationists were in custody. At the piers and near the end of the jetty, the transport crews were putting ashore the tanks, vehicles, and supplies of Combat Command B, 2d Armored Division. To guard against possible counterattacks, the tanks from the *Titania,* the *Harris,* and the *Lyon* were either concentrated at an assembly area on Horseshoe Hill, about three miles northeast of the harbor, or sent on reconnaissance toward Marrakech. Casualties had been light, only three dead and twenty-five wounded having been evacuated to the *Harris* by the medical beach party. One man had drowned while going over the side from the *Lyon.*

Air Action at Safi

On D Day no threat of a French counterattack from Marrakech was noted, but French air reconnaissance and strafing in the latter part of the afternoon, at the probable cost of one plane, indicated that stronger resistance might be forthcoming. It could, as an early morning warning stated, take the form of a heavy bombing raid on the shipping and stores concentrated in the port; or it might take the form of an overland attack by armored troops. In any event, the Americans would be vulnerable to the air but reasonably strong on the ground. Their objective remained that of getting the armor ashore and on its way north to help effect the capture of Casablanca, not to use it in an attack on Marrakech.

The morning of 9 November brought the expected French air strike. At dawn,

[9] Adams, AGF Obsr's Rpt, 7 Jan 43. Copy in AGF 319.1 (For. Obs), Binder 1, Tab 8.



NAVY FIGHTER PLANES FROM THE USS *SANTEE on the small airfield at Safi.*

just as planes from the *Santee* were beginning antisubmarine patrol, and with the coast itself shrouded in thick fog, what sounded like a considerable formation of enemy planes passed over the town and harbor. Only one determined bomber, unable to discern the target through the fog, swept under the ceiling for a low-level run over the seatrain with its load of medium tanks. It struck instead one of the small warehouses near the ship, a building which had been used as an ammunition dump. The structure was soon ablaze and ammunition began to explode. The resulting damage, casualties, and delay in unloading, though considerable for a single bomb, were minor for a whole raid. The plane itself was caught by antiaircraft fire and crashed on RED Beach. The rest of the French formation did not return.

Less than an hour later, an American carrier-based plane reconnoitered the Marrakech airdrome and was fired upon. The task force commander reluctantly concluded that the airfield must be neutralized before his armored column could leave the area for Casablanca. In the latter part of the afternoon, therefore, a formation of twelve planes from the *Santee* delivered the first attack, destroying eight or more widely dispersed aircraft on the ground and setting fire to the hangars. Eventually, some forty French planes of all types were destroyed on the Marrakech field.[10]

While approaching the Marrakech targets, and again on their return, the formation also attacked more than forty trucks

[10] Rpt, Capt Roland Getz to WTF, 28 Nov 42, in 47th Inf AAR.

carrying French reinforcements toward Safi, strafing and dispersing them. This air strike opened the last phase of the battle. With gasoline running too low for the return to the *Santee,* the planes had to land on the small airfield at Safi, which had been enclosed within the beachhead. But as the planes ran downgrade on its irregular runway, six hit soft spots and nosed over.

During the morning, Admiral Davidson and General Harmon recommended to Admiral Hewitt and General Patton that some of the Army P–40's on the carrier *Chenango* be based temporarily at Safi. The planes could use gasoline and ground crews furnished by General Harmon's force, with maintenance personnel and equipment from the cruiser *Philadelphia.* Drums of aviation gasoline and lubricating oil were taken to the airfield from the *Titania,* and four antiaircraft guns were set up there and manned by Army units. Although the P–40's were not sent, the little field was dotted by nightfall with the unfortunate planes from the *Santee.* To get five which were still operational back in the air on 10 November, a portion of the adjacent highway was prepared for use as an air strip. A bulldozer began to level the trees on either side and, although delayed during the night by a sniper, completed the task next morning. By then the wind had unfortunately shifted, sweeping across the highway. Only two out of five attempts at take-off were successful. The remaining planes were therefore left for salvage.

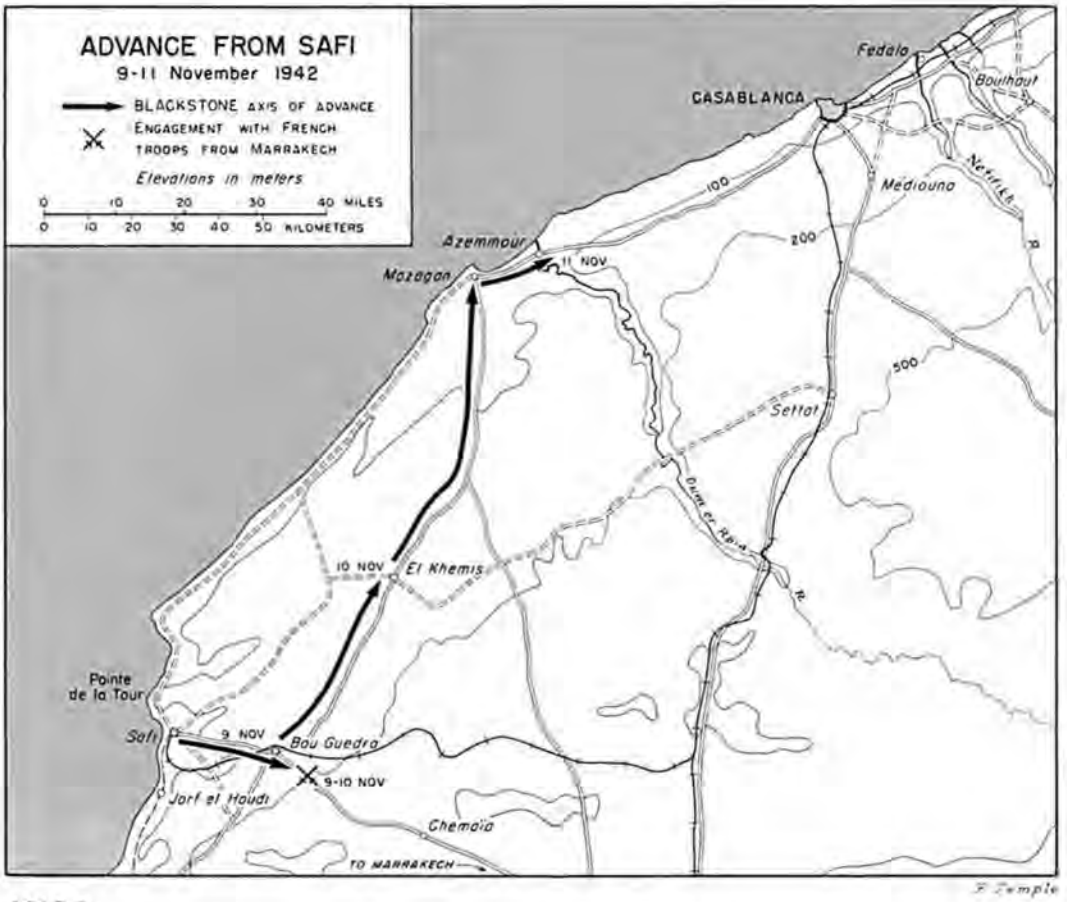
Unloading of cargo at Safi was completed as rapidly as possible, but with such insufficient provision for setting up inland dumps that the docks and beaches became congested. The transports, moored at the wharves or anchored off the end of the jetty, continued unloading throughout the first night after the landings. They were screened against submarines and air attack by a close semicircle of seven supporting warships while the cruiser, the escort carrier, and their respective destroyer screens moved out to sea. The *Titania's* landing craft were released to the *Calvert* as the former's cargo was swung by booms down to the phosphate pier. To unload, the *Calvert* first used BLUE and GREEN Beaches, then slips of the Petite Darse, and finally a berth vacated by the *Titania* on the evening of 11 November. The *Lyon* came in on the evening of the 12th. A large naval working party, after making room on the docks, emptied the *Lyon* in time for her departure at 1600, 13 November. The *Harris* and the *Dix* were similarly cleared for return to Norfolk at that time.[11]

Stopping French Reinforcement From Marrakech

The considerable French garrison at Marrakech, the center of the Safi–Mogador defense sector, was commanded by General Martin, from whom General Béthouart had expected to receive assistance. General Martin's intention to aid the Americans was revised upon his receipt of orders which he would not disobey but which he executed with what seemed like less than maximum power or alacrity.[12]

[11] (1) Emptying the *Harris* required 368 boatloads, and was completed on the afternoon of 11 November (D plus 3). The *Lakehurst* suffered a jammed derrick and thus got all the medium tanks ashore only after being at the pier about forty-eight hours. Ltr, Patton to Marshall, 15 Nov 42. Copy in OPD Exec 8, Bk. 7, Tab 5. (2) Patton Diary, 11 Nov 42.

[12] (1) Béthouart, The Occurrences of 8 November in Morocco. OCMH. (2) Ltr, Noguès to author, 28 Jan 50, notes on Amer landings in Morocco.



MAP 2

Reinforcements for the Safi garrison were first sighted on the highway from Marrakech at 1350 hours, 9 November. One section in fourteen trucks had almost reached the Bou Guedra crossroads, fifteen miles east of Safi, before being strafed by the planes from the *Santee*. (*Map 2*) Planes from the *Santee* dispersed a second and larger group of perhaps forty trucks at about 1600, ten miles east of Bou Guedra. Near Chemaïa, forty miles southeast of Safi, a third section consisting not only of trucks but also of horse-drawn vehicles and foot soldiers was observed and attacked about an hour later.[18] While these air attacks were delaying the French advance, the 1st Armored Landing Team's tanks and artillery

[18] This column was later identified as consisting of: the 11th Separate Squadron of the African Chasseurs; 1st Battalion (seven 75-mm. guns), Moroccan Colonial Artillery; 2d Battalion (two companies only), 2d Regiment of Foreign Legion Infantry; and Staff, Regimental Company, and 1st Battalion of the 2d Moroccan Tirailleurs Regiment, all under the command of Colonel Paris. Journal of Actions of the High Command of Moroccan Troops, 8–11 Nov 42. Copy in WTF Final Rpt, G–2 Annex, Item 11.



SEATRAIN *LAKEHURST at Safi after discharging her cargo of medium tanks. A damaged Navy scout observation plane is taken aboard.*

which had already come ashore were dispatched under command of Lt. Col. W. M. Stokes to intercept the column. First contact was reported at 1700, one and a half miles east of Bou Guedra. Colonel Stokes's force eliminated a French machine gun outpost there, took the bridge, and continued the advance until sunset. Mines along the road knocked out one American tank. The Americans bivouacked that night east of Bou Guedra and prepared for a morning battle. The French occupied defensive artillery positions commanding the passes in the foothills farther east, and waited.

When contact was resumed next morning, over three hundred 105-mm. shells were fired on the French artillery in the hills. The French replied for a time, revealing enough strength to promise a substantial engagement before progress toward Marrakech could be resumed. A determined attack with all elements of the armored force could have defeated the French only at some cost in casualties and delays. General Harmon's orders specified that he should undertake operations against the Marrakech garrison only to guarantee security to the beachhead at Safi and to his line of communications to the north. The principal need for his medium tanks was against the city of Casablanca, 140 miles away. General Harmon himself surveyed the situation at

Bou Guedra while the last tanks were being swung to the pier from the seatrain, and learned from the interrogation of prisoners that the French column had been deprived of its mobility by the previous day's air and ground action. He concluded that the 47th Combat Team, with its light tanks of Company B, 70th Tank Battalion, could contain the enemy and protect the unloading operations at Safi while the armored column disengaged after dark and started for Casablanca via Mazagan. Late that afternoon, when the medium tanks were all ashore, he issued orders for the night march. It might still be possible to contribute to the capture of Casablanca.[14]

The Armored Force Starts Toward Casablanca

At 0900, 10 November, Combat Command B, 2d Armored Division, began its march north from the vicinity of Bou Guedra over the road leading to Mazagan. Along the coast, the *Philadelphia, Cowie,* and *Knight* started for Mazagan about 1930 to furnish fire support for the armored column there. The *Bernadou* and *Cole,* laden with men, ammunition, and supplies, each escorting six landing craft which carried gasoline in cans, departed that same evening to bring supplementary fuel and ammunition for the armored vehicles. The forces by land and sea made steady, uneventful progress beneath a starlit sky.

The armored column halted at 0430, 11 November, three miles south of Mazagan, where the garrison was understood to be friendly and weak. Actually, it had been depleted by sending reinforcements to Casablanca. The bridge across the steep-sided Oum er Rbia river valley was intact and apparently not defended, but the principal crossing at Azemmour, twelve miles northeast of Mazagan, was believed to be strongly guarded by artillery, including antitank guns, and by infantry. The first step was to secure Mazagan and the next to cross the river at Azemmour, with a minimum of delay.

A reconnaissance force entered Mazagan without challenge about 0600, thus suggesting that capture of the town would be easy. The armored force south of Mazagan therefore divided, the medium tank battalion and one artillery battery going directly to seize the Azemmour bridge while the light tanks and another battery entered Mazagan. About 0730, the Azemmour bridge was found to be undefended. At the same time, planes from the cruiser *Philadelphia* and from the carrier *Santee* began to drone over Mazagan while tanks rumbled along its streets. Quickly and without a fight, the garrison made a formal surrender. Port and town were secured, but imperfect communication between General Harmon and Admiral Davidson left the latter for a time in some suspense. At 0850, a radio warning—"Stop bombing over Mazagan. No fight if no bombs"—indicated that his naval fire support would not be required. About an hour later, General Harmon's report of the earlier French surrender at 0745 was received by those on the *Philadelphia.*

The surrender of Mazagan, indeed, was made at the same time that Casablanca itself ceased all resistance to the American forces by which it was being encircled. Admiral Hewitt's instruction to withhold the bombardment of Casablanca was overheard

[14] (1) WTF Final Rpt, G–2 Annex, Item 5, p. 5. (2) The final report of the 47th Infantry's losses was: 7 killed in action; 41 wounded in action; 2 missing in action.

on the *Philadelphia* at 0710. Dispatches were sent from that cruiser to General Harmon by seaplane somewhat later, and Combat Command B, 2d Armored Division, was assembling southwest of Azemmour when the need to hurry northward to Casablanca came to an end.

Rather abruptly, then, Sub-Task Force BLACKSTONE's principal mission terminated without the final stage of commitment to battle in the vicinity of Casablanca. When General Noguès signified the readiness of Casablanca to cease resistance, the American armored force was not poised at the edge of the great city. It was more than fifty miles away, in the vicinity of Azemmour and Mazagan. Most of the tanks had not yet crossed the river. General Harmon's force had prevented the reinforcement of Casablanca, and of Safi itself, from Marrakech. While its armored elements had been moving to the position which they reached by sunrise on 11 November (D plus 3), the larger force at Fedala (Sub-Task Force BRUSHWOOD), with the Center Attack Group of the Western Naval Task Force, had been engaged in operations controlled by the fact that they were in much closer proximity to the ultimate objective. And farther north, the airfield at Port-Lyautey had come into American possession. From the operations of the Safi force, the story turns therefore to the battles nearer Casablanca during the same period.

CHAPTER VII

Fedala to Casablanca

The main amphibious attack for the capture of Casablanca was to be delivered at Fedala.[1] There Force BRUSHWOOD,[2] consisting of the 3d Infantry Division, reinforced mainly by an armored landing team from the 67th Armored Regiment, 2d Armored Division, was to establish itself on shore, seize the small port, and swing southwestward to capture Casablanca. While it was advancing to positions in the outskirts of that city, Combat Command B, 2d Armored Division, would be making its way to the southern side from its landings at Safi. Planes of the XII Air Support Command, using the Port-Lyautey airdrome soon after D Day, would supplement naval air support from the carrier *Ranger* and the escort carrier *Suwannee*. Off Casablanca, the warships of the Covering Group would protect the naval task force from French naval units based in Casablanca or Dakar. The *Augusta, Brooklyn,* and others would furnish fire support to troops ashore. But successful landings at Fedala were to be the first phase.

The town of Fedala is on a shallow bay which lies between two rivers and between the rugged projection of Cap de Fedala at the southwest and the bold headland of Cherqui, three miles to the northeast. (*Map II*) The small harbor is at the western end of the bay. Its protected waters are enclosed by an 800-foot breakwater on the inner side of the cape and another, extending twice as far and at right angles to it, from the southern shore of the bay. Through an opening about 100 yards wide between the tips of these jetties, a dredged channel enters the port. An almost continuous crescent of sandy beach extends from the longer breakwater to the Cherqui headland. At a few points this broad strand is divided by rocky outcrops and, at the base of Cherqui, by the mouth of the Nefifikh river. That stream enters the bay from a deep ravine or wadi extending almost directly south for well over a mile. The Mellah river on the other hand, the mouth of which is outside the bay at the base of Cap de Fedala, approaches the coast by a meandering course through marshes and tidal flats. From the sand dunes along the coast between these rivers, a level shelf extends inland for from half to three quarters of a mile before the land rises very gradually to less than 200 feet above sea level. A secondary coastal road and the railway between Casablanca and the north

[1] Basic sources for this chapter are: (1) WTF Final Rpt, Operations TORCH, with annexes. DRB AGO. See particularly Annex 2 (Sub-Task Force BRUSHWOOD Opns Rpt), 8 Dec 42, with incls. See also Annexes 7, 8, 9, and 11, as well as G–2 (Annex 5), Item 11, which contains a copy of Journal of Actions of the High Command of Moroccan Troops, 8–11 Nov 42. (2) 3d Div FO 1, 17 Oct 42, with annexes, 10–17 Oct 42. (3) Bn AAR's, especially those of 7th, 15th, 30th, 47th, and 60th Inf. (4) Action Rpts of CTG 34.1, CTG 34.9, and of *Leonard Wood, Joseph T. Dickman, Thomas Jefferson,* and *Charles Carroll.* (5) Col Harry McK. Roper, Obsr's Rpt, 22 Dec 42. DRB AGO.

[2] See pp. 121–22 below.



CAP DE FEDALA *with its petroleum storage tanks and lighthouse tower.*

run along the base of this easy slope. The main highway between Casablanca and Rabat lies one mile or more farther inland. The railroad skirts the town except for a short branch extending to the harbor.

Before World War II Fedala was a community of about 16,000 which combined the functions of a small fishing port, a major petroleum storage and distributing point, and a popular pleasure resort. Its hotel, race track, casino, golf course, broad, palm-lined streets and formal gardens, its parks and bathing beach, were among the attractions for vacationists. Several sets of petroleum storage tanks, a small harbor, and the fishing port within it, met the chief requirements of commerce. On Cap de Fedala a lighthouse tower guided pilots past several hazards in adjacent waters.

Within five miles of Fedala on either side, ten possible sandy landing beaches were designated. Four were deemed appropriate for major use by battalion landing teams and two for auxiliary use by smaller units on special missions. All the main landings were directed to sections of shore in the Baie de Fedala identified as Beaches RED 2, RED 3, BLUE, and BLUE 2. RED beach lay directly under the guns on Cap de Fedala and was faced by a ten-foot seawall. It was reserved for follow-up landings when the whole region should be under American control. Smaller units could land at Beach YELLOW, near the mouth of the Mellah river, and on Beach BLUE 3, in the Mansouria inlet about three miles northeast of the Cherqui headland. Except for Beach BLUE 2, which was on the shore of a cove at the Nefifikh river's mouth, all four of the better beaches led by an easy gradient through sand dunes to flat land above. All four beaches were dangerously exposed to the high surf which surged in on an average of four days out of five in November. Even more unprotected were

the shores directly northeast of Cherqui and southwest of Cap de Fedala.

The advance from the Baie de Fedala to Casablanca was to be made over an area extending along the coast some sixteen miles. The initial beachhead was to extend about five miles inland between the eastern bank of the Nefifikh river and the western edge of the Mellah river. Thereafter, during D Day the prescribed objective line would be reached by advancing southwesterly for another four miles beyond the Mellah.

The most dangerous feature of the amphibious attack at Fedala was the ability of coastal defense guns there to enfilade the beaches. Two batteries were in menacing positions on Cap de Fedala. From the tip, two 75-mm. guns with a range of 9,000 yards could fire on any of the beaches on which major landings were planned. Near the base of the cape, four 100-mm. guns comprised the Batterie de Fedala, or Batterie du Port, and could fire directed salvos within a range of 15,400 yards. The most powerful battery was on the Cherqui headland. It was known as the Batterie du Pont Blondin and consisted of four 138.6-mm. (5.4-inch) guns capable of firing on targets 20,000 yards distant. Near these guns were searchlights, antiaircraft machine guns, and rifle and machine gun pits—all on ground well organized for defense. A fourth battery was reported to consist of "three or four large-caliber guns" at a point about two miles northeast of the Batterie du Pont Blondin and 1,600 yards southwest of Mansouria inlet.

Antiaircraft batteries had been identified southwest of Fedala near the golf course, on the golf course itself, and farther up the Mellah river on its western bank, south of the railroad. Two antiaircraft or dual purpose guns, as large as 105-mm. in caliber, and others, 75-mm. or perhaps 90-mm., with searchlights and small antiaircraft machine guns were indicated at these sites.

If Fedala's coastal batteries were the greatest hazard to the landing force, the proximity of the French naval units in Casablanca harbor furnished another threat. The *Jean Bart's* big 15-inch rifles could reach the Fedala area, several submarines might slip out to inflict grave damage on the transports or escort vessels, and other French warships would no doubt be ready to grasp an opportunity to interfere with American naval support of the forces ashore.

Fedala's garrison was estimated at not quite 2,500 men, consisting of a battalion plus one company of infantry, two mechanized troops of Spahis, an antiaircraft artillery battery, and other artillery units. The field artillery had an undetermined number of 75-mm. guns and sixteen 13.2-mm. machine guns. Reinforcements could be expected from Rabat, only forty-three miles to the northeast; up to five battalions of cavalry, two armored battalions, and several battalions of infantry might come from as far away as Meknès.

Casablanca's defenders were estimated at five battalions of infantry (4,325 men)—colonial, Moroccan, and Senegalese; at least two troops of cavalry (300 men), of which one would be mechanized; two battalions of artillery and one of antiaircraft (1,600–1,700 men); naval ground units operating the coastal defense guns, and a strong assemblage of warships at the Casablanca naval base. From the Rabat–Salé and Cazes airdromes, according to best reports, the French Air Force could throw fifty fighters and thirty bombers into the battle. Reinforcements were expected from Mazagan, Kasba Tadla, and Mediouna. Thus the attack on Casablanca from Fedala

might require seizure of the beachhead from somewhat less than 2,500 defenders; defense of Fedala from counterattack and advance southwestward along the coast would have to be made against perhaps 6,500 others.

In moving to invest Casablanca, some American units would push inland to encircle the city and cut its approaches from the southeast and south. The terrain to be covered in this scheme of maneuver was not difficult. The flat shelf along the coast was not quite one mile in depth, rising gradually to a tableland eroded into low, gently contoured hills and ridges. Small vineyards and clumps of woods were widely dispersed among numerous small farms. Footpaths and mule tracks crossed the hills in many directions. One stream bed, that of the Hasser river, wound southwesterly from the Mellah between banks neither high nor precipitous.

The approach to Casablanca along either the main highway or the railway from Rabat led through the eastern suburb of Aïn Sebaâ, about three miles from the harbor, and past an industrial section south of Roches Noires. At Aïn Sebaâ, a peripheral road, the Route de Grande Ceinture, branched southwestward from the main highway and circled Casablanca at a distance of from three to four miles from the port. On the level ground and easy slopes between this road and the thickly settled portion of the city, the parks, cemeteries, and newer residential areas which fringed the city were to be found. On the western side of the city about three miles from the harbor were the racecourse, hotel, and suburban estates of Anfa, the scene of President Roosevelt's overseas conference with Prime Minister Churchill and the Combined Chiefs of Staff two months later.

Casablanca lies at a bulge on the six miles of coast between two headlands, Table d'Oukacha on the east and El Hank on the west. The artificial harbor was east of the bulge. Its area and depth, the tugs and barges there, the power-driven cranes, railway sidings, and covered storage—all made it a maritime prize in 1942.

Casablanca's coastal defenses were strong. On Pointe El Hank were two batteries, one consisting of four 194–mm. (7.6-inch) and the other of four 138.6-mm. (5.4-inch) guns, each equipped with range finder apparatus and searchlights and protected by concrete emplacements and by organized defensive positions. On Table d'Oukacha, a battery of four 100-mm. guns was similarly equipped. In the harbor at the end of a long jetty were two 75-mm. coast defense guns. The port was protected by a six-and-one-half-foot concrete wall from one breakwater to the other and bristled with antiaircraft batteries and machine guns in protected emplacements along jetties.

The antiaircraft defenses included batteries of 75-mm. guns on El Hank, in the harbor, on the golf course at Anfa, and in Aïn Sebaâ. Southwest of the city was the Cazes airfield, from which defending planes might rise to protect the port and city. The Covering Group of the Western Naval Task Force was to wait for the French to open hostilities. The American plan of attack contemplated only counterbattery fire against the French coastal guns and no overland assault against them except from Fedala and Safi.

Such then were the objective and the defenses. Now to turn to the actual Fedala–Casablanca operation. The joint Army-Navy expeditionary force making the amphibious attack at Fedala consisted of the Center Attack Group of the Western Naval



CASABLANCA, *the main objective on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. Note lighthouse on Pointe el Hank, center foreground, top.*



Task Force carrying Sub-Task Force BRUSHWOOD. The fire support vessels were the cruisers *Augusta* and *Brooklyn* and the destroyers *Wilkes, Swanson, Ludlow,* and *Murphy.* Air support was furnished from the carrier *Ranger* and the escort carrier *Suwannee,* protected by one cruiser and five destroyers. Troop and cargo transports numbered fifteen, screened by a squadron of six destroyers. Also on hand were the tanker *Winooski* and five mine craft. The Center Attack Group, with 17,700 naval personnel, was commanded from the transport *Leonard Wood* by Capt. R. R. M. Emmett (USN).

Force BRUSHWOOD—the 3d Infantry Division, reinforced chiefly by an armored landing team from the 1st Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment (Maj. Richard E. Nelson)—was organized into three regimental landing groups (RLG's). These were based on the 7th (Col. Robert C. Macon), the 15th (Col. Thomas H. Monroe), and the 30th (Col. Arthur H. Rogers) Infantry Regiments. Each regimental landing group consisted of three battalion landing teams comprising in the main a battalion of infantry, a platoon of combat engineers, one or more platoons of self-propelled antiaircraft guns, shore fire control and air support parties, medical, signal, service, and other detachments, and in the case of two RLG's (7th and 30th), a company of shore party engineers and a platoon of light tanks. RLG 15 was to land later at the same beaches as the other two. Supporting arms were drawn from the 9th, 10th, 39th, and 41st Field Artillery Battalions, the 10th Combat Engineer Battalion, 36th Engineer Regiment (shore party), 443rd Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion (SP), and the 756th Tank Battalion. The Armored Landing Team included elements of the 41st Armored Infantry Regiment, 78th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, 17th Armored Engineer Battalion, and 82d Reconnaissance Battalion, all from the 2d Armored Division. Force BRUSHWOOD was commanded by Maj. Gen. Jonathan W. Anderson, as already noted; the assistant division commander was Brig. Gen. William W. Eagles; Brig. Gen. William A. Campbell was division artillery commander; and Col. Walter E. Lauer was the chief of staff. With all detachments included, the force totaled approximately 19,500 officers, enlisted men, and civilians.[3]

The general scheme of maneuver by Force BRUSHWOOD was for BLT 1–7 (Lt. Col. Roy E. Moore)—or 1st Battalion Landing Team of the 7th Regimental Landing Group—to occupy the town and cape, BLT 2–7 (Lt. Col. Rafael L. Salzmann) to control the bridges over the Mellah river and to clear a regimental zone south and west of the town, BLT 1–30 (Lt. Col. Fred W. Sladen, Jr.) to push four miles southward to a long ridge well beyond the main Casablanca–Rabat highway, and BLT 2–30 (Lt. Col. Lyle W. Bernard) to occupy the Cherqui headland, the bridges over the Nefifikh river, and a defense line on the eastern bank of that stream against possible reinforcements from the direction of Rabat. The third battalion of each of these RLG's minus its Company L, would be in floating regimental reserve, and the entire 15th RLG would be in Force BRUSHWOOD reserve, prepared to land two hours after the assault battalions. The 15th RLG

[3] The Army troop list of 22 October 1942 shows a total of 19,364 men and 1,732 vehicles (see Table 2). The *Leonard Wood's* Action Report, 30 November 1942, tabulates the troops and vehicles per ship with a total of 19,870 men and 1,701 vehicles. Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations,* II, 37, 55, sets the total at 18,783 and on p. 158 adopts the total of 19,870.

TABLE 2—PERSONNEL AND VEHICLES ASSIGNED TO FORCE "Y" (BRUSHWOOD), AS OF 22 OCTOBER 1942

Unit	Personnel			Vehicles
	Total	Officers	Enlisted	
Total	19,364	1,087	18,277	1,732
3d Infantry Division				
1st RLG (reinforced), 7th Infantry [a]	5,245	224	5,021	443
2d RLG (reinforced), 30th Infantry [b]	5,245	224	5,021	443
15th Infantry	3,838	178	3,660	341
Headquarters, Headquarters Company, Signal Company, 3d Infantry Division	499	56	443	61
Headquarters, Task Force "A"	317	93	224	54
Armored Landing Team				
1st Battalion (reinforced), 67th Armored Regiment [c]	875	38	837	148
Other Force "Y" Personnel				
Detachments, XII Air Support Command	1,485	166	1,319	91
436th Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion	532	32	500	79
443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion (one and a half platoons only)	53	2	51	13
2d Battalion, 20th Engineer Regiment [d]	607	17	590	10
204th Military Police Company	113	4	109	0
36th Engineer Regiment (less detachments)	116	12	104	4
Detachment of				
66th Engineer Company (Topographic)	6	1	5	0
1st Armored Signal Battalion	162	5	157	19
122d Signal Company (Radio Intelligence)	26	1	25	4
163d Signal Company (Photographic)	12	2	10	2
239th Signal Company (Operational)	47	1	46	5
829th Signal Service Battalion	90	3	87	10
1st Broadcasting Station Operation Detachment	30	11	19	5
Counterintelligence Group	37	7	30	0
Prisoner Interrogation Group	25	6	19	0
Civil Government Personnel	4	4	0	0

[a] Including Battery A (less 4th Platoon), 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion, and 1st Battalion, 36th Engineer Regiment.
[b] Including Battery B (less 1st Platoon), 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion, and 3d Battalion, 36th Engineer Regiment.
[c] Including Battery C (2d and 4th Platoons), 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion.
[d] With headquarters detachment and Service Company attached.

Source: Annex A (Troop List) to Memo, TF "A" to ACofS OPD, 22 Oct 42. Order of Battle TF "A" 1942, St. Louis Rcds.

was to assemble ashore in the 7th RLG's zone and to advance southwestward at the left of the 7th RLG while the 30th RLG secured the rear and furnished a reserve battalion. The two L Companies and the 3d Reconnaissance Troop had their special missions following landings at the extreme flanks. The 2d Battalion, 20th Engineers (Combat), which was in Western Task Force reserve with a company of the 204th Military Police Battalion, and the Armored Landing Team, 67th Armored Regiment,



TRANSPORTS OF THE CENTER ATTACK GROUP *near the beaches of Fedala.*

were expected to land on call at least three hours after the first wave, the former initially to relieve BLT 1–7 in Fedala and the latter to join RLG's 7 and 15 in the drive on Casablanca. Once the port was in American hands, it was to be used first for unloading armored vehicles and heavy equipment, and then for other matériel.

The Landings Begin

Running through intermittent rain squalls, the Center Attack Group arrived off Fedala shortly before midnight, 7–8 November 1942. Soon afterward the lights of Casablanca and Fedala were suddenly extinguished. The transports were organized into four columns, with the *Leonard Wood* (BLT 1–7), *Thomas Jefferson* (BLT 2–7), *Charles Carroll* (BLT 1–30), and *Joseph T. Dickman* (BLT 2–30) in the column nearest the shore. Discovery as the convoy neared its destination that an unexpected current had carried it a few miles from the desired position resulted in a series of emergency turns during which the transport formation became badly deranged. Radar revealed that some transports were at least 10,000 yards from their designated place. The vessels therefore had to continue movement in the darkness, aided by a control vessel, in order to re-establish their planned formation within a transport area six to eight miles offshore.

When Captain Emmett described the naval situation to General Anderson at 0130, the four assault BLT's were on transports near their assigned positions, and it seemed likely that the men could disembark in time for the 0400 H Hour. Other ships might or might not be able to participate as expected. An attempt was therefore begun to carry out the basic plan. Three scout boats went in to find and mark the beaches. Three quarters of an hour later, reports of the lagging rate at which vehicles and heavy equipment from the *Leonard Wood* were being unloaded, and of the slowness with which landing craft were assembling from each transport at the rendezvous

points, made it apparent that a half hour's delay was essential. Orders were issued to the transports to use their own landing craft to disembark as large a proportion of the assault BLT's as possible without waiting for the arrival of the boats from other transports in outer positions. Even with this improvisation the men, weighted by heavy, cumbersome packs, clambered down the sides of the ships at too slow a pace to fill up the bobbing craft for the 0430 H Hour. Another postponement of fifteen minutes was authorized.

The 3d Division's command had concluded from its training experiences that in order to insure integrity of units upon landing and to expedite their reorganization ashore to prevent defeat in detail, all assault and reserve BLT's ought to be assembled afloat in landing craft before the start toward the landing beach, and all should be put ashore as fast as possible. At Fedala, each assault battalion had its own landing schedule adapted to the particular characteristics of its beach and its mission. Each of the four BLT's required groups of from forty-three to forty-five personnel landing craft and from five to nine tank lighters, for landings extending over periods of from one to three hours. The fact that none of the transports carried more than thirty-four landing craft necessitated the temporary use of boats and crews from other transports. All these details had been most carefully combined in an elaborate boat employment plan designed to put the required assault units ashore before daylight and to land supporting elements there with great rapidity during the morning.

At about 0400 the four control destroyers, the *Wilkes, Swanson, Ludlow,* and *Murphy,* each conducting the landing craft for which it was responsible, moved to a line of departure, 4,000 yards from the beach designated for its battalion landing team. BLT 1–7 was to land on Beach RED 2; BLT 2–7, on Beach RED 3; BLT 1–30, on Beach BLUE; and BLT 2–30, on Beach BLUE 2. But all the boat waves were not then ready.[4] In fact, the landings at Fedala began at the outset to depart from the plan and continued to be only an approximation of what had been worked out as the best means of getting necessary forces ashore.

Silencing the coastal batteries, a mission of paramount importance, was the first assignment of the forces being sent ashore. BLT 2–30 (Colonel Bernard) was expected to capture the Batterie du Pont Blondin, just east of the Nefifikh river, assisted by Company L, 30th Infantry. BLT 1–7 (Colonel Moore) was charged with taking the town of Fedala and continuing on to the cape to seize the two batteries there. The 3d Reconnaissance Troop (Capt. Robert W. Crandall), landing on Beach YELLOW, was to destroy the antiaircraft installations in the vicinity of the golf course and then, after crossing the Mellah, to attack the positions on Cap de Fedala from the southwest, on the western side of Moore's unit.

Next most pressing objective was the control of the highway and railway bridges over the Mellah before they could be destroyed, or used by French troops for retreat or re-

[4] Only four out of seven waves from the *Wood,* five out of eight from the *Jefferson,* five and one-half out of fifteen from the *Carroll,* and four out of five from the *Dickman,* which were bound for Beach BLUE 2, reported. From the fourth wave, three of the six boats had failed to appear at starting time, but two of them, including the boat with the commanding officer of BLT 2–30, went in independently. Their navigation was such that they ended up thousands of yards to the northeast of Beach BLUE 2, well apart from the battalion's attack. Two entire waves from the *Carroll* of three or four boats each missed the rendezvous with the *Ludlow* and went toward Beach BLUE unescorted.

inforcement. BLT 2–7 (Colonel Salzmann) was to seize these bridges from the east while another unit, Company L, 7th Infantry, landed on Beach YELLOW an hour after the 3d .Reconnaissance Troop and supported Salzmann's unit from the western bank of the stream.

The first waves of Force BRUSHWOOD actually started toward the beaches from the line of departure at about 0445. The men, in herringbone twill fatigue uniforms and with U.S. flag arm bands, were heavily laden. They could see near shore the lights of the scout boats blinking energetically but could observe no sign of action on land. The run to shore took from fifteen to twenty minutes. A warning from Casablanca had been sent to Fedala as it had to Safi, but, if received, it had not told the French defenders how or from whom to expect an attack, and some French troops remained in barracks. When the motors of the landing craft were first heard and reported, searchlights on Cap de Fedala and Cherqui shot skyward in quest of airplanes, and because vertical searchlight beams had been specified in General Eisenhower's broadcast as a sign of nonresistance, they brought a brief but mistaken moment of hope. Almost at once the lights came down to play over the sea approaches and on the incoming boatloads of troops. Machine gun fire from support boats which were escorting the landing craft on the last stage of the run caused the lights to darken abruptly. The first men leaped ashore during this episode. Loss of craft during the first landings greatly added to the delay and confusion caused by the complicated boat employment plan. The lift available for later trips from ship to shore was sharply reduced by such losses. Faulty navigation, attributable to either compass deviations, inexperienced crews, or other causes, brought boatloads of troops to shore sometimes miles from the designated points, and onto rocky obstructions or reefs rather than at sandy beaches. The consequences were serious even when the boats were able to retract from these landings, with such major ill effects as the scattering of troop units, the loss of control over the ensuing deployment, and the separation of weapons and equipment from units expecting to operate with them. But the boats too often could not retract and met destruction under circumstances which drowned some of their passengers and left the survivors cut and battered and deprived of weapons or radio sets needed in the assault.

First to land at about 0500 were elements of BLT 1–7 from the *Leonard Wood*. The thirty-one boats carrying the first four waves of the battalion toward Beach RED 2 ended up partly on that beach, partly on Beach RED 3, and partly on the rocky shore which lay between them. The surf swept many boats out of control, throwing them against rocks with such destructive force that they either capsized or were smashed. A total of twenty-one boats were lost. Heavily laden troops could not swim, and drowned. From the *Thomas Jefferson*, whose beach-marking scout boat was out of position, the landing craft bringing BLT 2–7 to Beach RED 3 went instead to Beach BLUE 2 at the mouth of the Nefifikh and two or three miles farther northeast along the coast to tiny beaches or rocky reefs. The landings began about one hour after those of the 1st BLT. The commanding officer of BLT 2–30 (Colonel Bernard) and his headquarters were also carried over three miles east of the battalion, which landed as planned on Beach BLUE 2. The *Jefferson* lost 16 of her 33 landing craft, while 6 more were damaged on their first trip to shore. Of 25 land-



BEACH RED 3, FEDALA, *at 1100, 8 November. Landing craft with high ramps is an LCM.*

ing craft from the *Carroll* heading for BLUE Beach with units of BLT 1–30, 18 were wrecked on the first landing, 5 more on the second, and only 2 continued in service. Despite these losses, searchlight illumination of the beach, and machine gun fire, all three rifle companies were ashore by 0600. The *Dickman*'s boat crews made the best record, losing only 2 out of 27 craft on Beach BLUE 2 in the initial landing of BLT 2–30, and getting the others back to the transport promptly for a second trip to shore.

The landings began during ebb tide. Boats which were not quickly unloaded became stranded. Following waves came in at intervals scheduled so close that not only could they not be warned away from obstacles, but they also prevented retracting operations by their predecessors. Lighters with vehicles aboard were sometimes held at the water's edge because the motors would not start so that the vehicles had to be pulled ashore rather than being swiftly driven off under their own power. Most common of the situations delaying retraction was the failure of the troops in the inadequate Army shore parties to unload matériel. Unassisted boat crews were too slow. When naval beach party personnel helped, they were thus diverted from salvage operations or from marking hydrographic obstacles off the beaches. Landing craft which had not been withdrawn were hit and wrecked by the high surf on the later flood tide. For these and other reasons, the Center Naval Task Group suffered the loss of a very high proportion of its landing craft. The damaging effect of such heavy losses on the build-up of troops and supplies ashore was felt throughout the operation. This mis-



THE WADI NEFIFIKH AND BEACH BLUE 2. *Note landing craft on beach.*

fortune was one of the factors which made swift investment of Casablanca impossible.[5]

Clearing Cap de Fedala

Less than forty-five minutes of darkness remained after the first landings before the coastal guns would have targets visible in the dim first light. Elements of Colonel Moore's 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry, assembled at the inland edge of Beach RED 2 without opposition and hastened toward Fedala. One company of the 6th Senegalese Infantry Regiment, the only infantry unit in the garrison, was quickly surprised and captured. Ten German Armistice Commissioners fled from their headquarters at the Miramar Hotel just before a platoon entered the building, but they were caught in automobiles before they got out of town. By 0600 Fedala itself was under American control.

The guns of Cap de Fedala opened fire on the ships offshore at about the same time as did the Batterie du Pont Blondin, that is, a few minutes after 0600. Naval counterbattery fire against these guns on the cape was hampered from the first by the proximity of petroleum tanks which the invaders wished to leave undamaged. Fire from one of the destroyers which quickly replied to French shelling did strike one of the tanks and set it afire. The flagship *Augusta* succeeded in silencing the Cap de Fedala batteries only temporarily by less than a quarter hour's bombardment from her 8-inch guns.

[5] Memo, Adm Hewitt for Gen Handy, 5 Feb 43, sub: Amph tng. FE 25/A16-3, Ser 0059, Kansas City Rcds Ctr.

At irregular intervals during the morning, one or more of the 100-mm. guns of the Batterie du Port resumed fire, especially against the beaches near the Cherqui headland across the bay, where the 30th RLG was landing. These actions drew counter-battery fire from some of the destroyers which caused the French to suspend firing for a while. Some American shells which passed only a short distance over the guns or storage tanks on the cape carried into the port or the town, where they struck the Hotel Miramar and also menaced friendly troops.

The first detachment of Force BRUSHWOOD headquarters landed at Beach RED 2 before 0800 under command of General Eagles. From a grove near that beach, this forward section established radio communications with General Anderson aboard the *Leonard Wood*. General Eagles sent staff observers to ascertain the progress of Moore's and Bernard's BLT's at the cape and headland. When the remainder of the forward echelon landed with General Anderson and Beach BLUE at 0945, French artillery fire struck near them but inflicted no casualties.

Moore's battalion turned in the meantime from occupying Fedala to carrying out two separate but related actions—an attack on the heavy antiaircraft batteries near the race track southwest of the town, and an attack along the cape to capture the 100-mm. guns of the Batterie du Port, a 75-mm. battery, a fire control station, and some emplaced antiaircraft machine guns. The heavy antiaircraft battery was scheduled for seizure by a surprise assault in darkness by the 3d Reconnaissance Troop after a landing from rubber assault boats at Beach YELLOW. Wearing special black uniforms, this unit waited while a series of mishaps delayed its landing so long that the attempt either had to begin in daylight on a well-defended beach or had to be abandoned. The unit returned to the transport *Tasker H. Bliss* without attempting an operation so different from that for which it was prepared. The antiaircraft battery thus was able to pin down elements of Company C, 7th Infantry, by direct fire when they tried to approach Cap de Fedala from the town. Although a bazooka succeeded in temporarily silencing this battery, it was not actually surrendered to Moore's force until about 1100.

American naval gunfire on the cape also deterred the attacking troops. Colonel Moore's urgent requests to terminate the bombardment, relayed to the *Leonard Wood* as early as 0845, were repeated. But the simultaneous predicament of Colonel Rogers' 30th RLG, which was under intermittent fire from the French guns on the cape, caused Rogers to urge that the naval gunfire be continued until those guns were completely neutralized. His recommendations were approved, so that Moore's attack along the cape was retarded until about 1140. At that juncture, the unsuccessful attempt to neutralize the guns was superseded by an effort to seize them by means of a tank-infantry assault, supported by field artillery.

Company A, 7th Infantry, supported by four light tanks of Company A, 756th Tank Battalion, which were directed by Colonel Wilbur from an exposed position on one of the tanks, obtained the surrender of the fire control station and main 100-mm. battery with twenty-two prisoners at about noon.[6]

[6] For this exploit, and his earlier mission to Casablanca through the French lines, Colonel Wilbur was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. See *The Medal of Honor of the United States Army* (Washington, 1948), pp. 232–33.



LIGHT TANK M5 NEAR FEDALA *on D-Day morning. A U.S. flag is painted on the tank, and men from the 7th Infantry Regiment are wearing U.S. flag arm bands.*

The highly effective 75-mm. guns and machine guns in concrete emplacements on the tip of the cape held out until 1500. They surrendered after being subjected to mortar fire from Fedala and shells from two 75-mm. pack howitzers inland from Beach RED 2. Lifting of this fire brought to an end the bombardment which had begun with the naval gunfire in the morning.

The Capture of the Batterie du Pont Blondin

At the eastern end of the bay the Batterie du Pont Blondin was captured by elements of two BLT's as a consequence of admirable initiative and a thorough grasp of the whole plan by company commanders and platoon leaders. The objective had been assigned to Colonel Bernard's BLT 2–30, but the battalion commander was carried almost three miles from the beach (BLUE 2) where the main portion of his BLT had come ashore. Nevertheless BLT 2–30's heavy weapons company got its mortars into position ashore and, with elements of the rifle companies, prepared to assault the battery from the west. At the same time, quite independently, Colonel Salzmann, who had also been put ashore at the wrong point, attacked the objective from the east with one section of mortars and four rifle platoons. These units had landed on the reefs and small beaches northeast of Cherqui instead of on Beach RED 3 and could not well proceed on their own assigned mission. But while the troops were

organizing the attack the Batterie du Pont Blondin, like the guns on Cap de Fedala, took advantage of the first streaks of daylight to begin firing on the beaches, the approaches, and the control vessels near the shore. By 0610 the four destroyers and the coastal guns were exchanging shells; Captain Emmett was about to signal "Play Ball"; and in preparation for that order, which came shortly thereafter, the ships were hastening to their fire support areas. The cruiser *Brooklyn* came in with a rush from an outer patrolling position, sent up a spotting plane, and at 0622 fired her first salvo of 6-inch shells. The transports suspended debarkation and unloading and hurried farther out to sea. Three of the control destroyers, the *Wilkes, Swanson,* and *Ludlow,* continued into fire support areas while the *Murphy,* still only about 5,000 yards from the headland, drew heavy fire which first straddled and then struck her, forcing her to withdraw.[7]

Like the *Philadelphia*'s bombardment of the Batterie de la Railleuse at Safi, the *Brooklyn* soon struck the fire control apparatus within the fortifications on Cherqui and rendered it useless. Another shell hit one of the gun emplacements, putting a gun out of action, igniting the powder bags, and causing many casualties. The ground troops, who had almost surrounded the battery, organized while waiting for the bombardment from the sea to lift and added 81-mm. mortar shells to the projectiles from the *Brooklyn.* At the first opportunity they pushed in from several sides. Capt. M. E. Porter, commander of Company H, 30th Infantry, received the surrender at approximately 0730, with Colonel Salzmann acting as interpreter. Not long afterward Colonel Bernard, commanding BLT 2–30, reached the position, put a rifle company in charge, and sent the other elements to join the rest of the BLT in seizing the crossings over the Nefifikh river and in setting up defenses against counterattacks from the northeast. The elements of Colonel Salzmann's BLT 2–7 which had joined in taking the battery crossed the Pont Blondin to an assembly area near Beach RED 3. Here they were joined by the remainder of their BLT and moved along the coastal road to the western bank of the Mellah river, a march of about seven miles, which they completed during the latter part of the afternoon.[8]

Other D-Day Landings at Fedala

While Moore's BLT 1–7 was occupying Fedala and the cape, on the right (west) flank of the beachhead, and while Bernard's BLT 2–30 and part of Salzmann's BLT 2–7 were investing the Cherqui headland and seizing the Nefifikh bridges at the left (east), Sladen's BLT 1–30 landed its three rifle companies in a series of small waves on Beach BLUE. The craft had run through intermittent searchlight illumination and machine gunning without casualties or serious damage but, as already noted, had sustained severe losses in the surf. The BLT organized just above the beach as daylight began and pressed southward toward the higher ground which it was to hold. A train for Rabat was intercepted about one mile west of the Nefifikh river bridge and searched. French Army, Navy, and Air Force personnel, about seventy-five in all, were removed and held as prisoners. The train was immobilized. Despite occasional artillery fire and strafing air attacks, Sla-

[7] (1) 30th Inf Hist, 1 Apr 43. (2) CTG 34.9 Rpt, 30 Nov 42, with incls.

[8] WTF Final Rpt, Annex 2, 8 Dec 42.

den's battalion reached its objective without a fight, and by 1600, had consolidated positions for defense according to the tactical plan.

The four assault BLT's had thus successfully accomplished their first missions, but the two L Companies scheduled to land on the western and eastern flanks were frustrated by delays that prevented them from landing before daylight. They went ashore during the morning on beaches not related to their original planned missions and marched to join their respective regiments.

BLT 3–7 (Lt. Col. Ashton H. Manhart) (less Company L) began landing at about 0930 on Beach RED 3, an operation which continued for a considerable period because of the shortage in serviceable landing craft. It then went into an assembly area southeast of Fedala near the 7th RLG command post.

BLT 3–30 (Maj. Charles E. Johnson) (including Company L) started arriving at Beach BLUE 2 (as well as on the rocks and reefs to the northeast of Cherqui) about 0900. It suffered some casualties from artillery fire and from strafing airplanes as it moved inland to an area west of the Nefifikh during the remainder of the morning.

The rifle companies of BLT 1–15 (Maj. Arthur W. Gardner), served by only a small number of boats, began to land at 1430, and were scattered on several beaches. They were sent to hold the bridge over the Mellah on the main Rabat–Casablanca highway, while the remainder of the RLG was ordered to get ashore as rapidly as possible. Just prior to darkness Major Gardner's BLT arrived east of the bridge, made contact with the 7th RLG on its right, sent outposts to organize a defensive bridgehead on the western bank, and prepared its night position. Company D and its heavy weapons arrived in the assembly area after dark. The BLT had reached its D-Day objective without encountering French forces.

General Patton first prepared to leave the *Augusta* for the Fedala beachhead at 0800 on D Day with part of his staff. Their effects were loaded in a landing craft, swinging from davits. Before it could be lowered, the cruiser became engaged in firing missions and maneuvers which precluded his departure. For over three hours, he was an involuntary observer of the ship's skillful participation in a sea battle to turn back French warships emerging from the port of Casablanca. For a few minutes the ship also engaged in antiaircraft activity in an effort to defend the transports off Fedala against attack by French bombers. The first muzzle blast of the *Augusta's* rear turret blew the waiting landing craft to pieces, but the general could take satisfaction in the fact that only a minute or two earlier, his distinctive brace of pistols with the white stocks had been taken out and brought to him. He reached Fedala, therefore, at 1320 when the firing on Cap de Fedala was still in progress, although light resistance elsewhere in the beachhead had ended.[9]

The French Reaction Ashore

French resistance to the American landings began, as indicated in a previous chapter, in the belief by those in command that the operation was a minor attack and that General Béthouart had been misled concerning its nature. The standing orders for defense which had been prepared under di-

[9] Patton Diary, 8 Nov. 42. The *Augusta's* action illustrated how its overlapping missions interfered with the most efficient control of operations ashore and offshore. A separate command ship was available for the next great amphibious assault in the Mediterranean, the attack on Sicily.

rectives from the Commander in Chief of French Forces in North Africa, General Juin, were put into effect by Admiral Michelier in the Casablanca zone for which he was responsible, by General Martin at Marrakech, and by General Dody at Meknès. Admiral Michelier's naval forces were alerted for action. General Lahoulle reluctantly sent his air units into action. General Lascroux, after being tricked into entering protective custody in Meknès, was permitted to return to his headquarters in Rabat, from which he could control the Army's defensive operations. The Residency there was divested of the cordon which had surrounded it, and General Béthouart and his leading associates submitted to arrest. General Noguès, after a night of hectic activity, slept during the latter part of the morning, and rose to confront a situation not yet very clearly defined. The invaders were coming ashore at several points, but so lacking in strength, apparently, that the weak defenders were able to hold them except at Fedala. Michelier had repudiated the opportunity to arrange a cease fire when Colonel Wilbur visited his headquarters early in the forenoon.

As soon as General Patton landed at Fedala, the French commandant there was brought to him by General Anderson. The commandant urged that envoys be sent to Casablanca to demand surrender, since the French Army did not wish to fight the Americans.

Colonel Gay thereupon rode from Fedala under a flag of truce to the admiralty in Casablanca to try again, as Colonel Wilbur had tried earlier, to persuade the French to stop hostilities. The French Army leaders were eager to have the fighting stopped, and some of them even suggested a course for the Americans to adopt if a surrender of the city had to be gained by force, but the commander, Admiral Michelier again declined even to receive the American emissary.[10]

The suddenness of the American invasion of Morocco had disrupted the French Army's plans for defense. It became impossible to concentrate all the major units designated for the three mobile reserve groups and, in fact, wholly impossible to establish the light armored brigade. From almost the first hostilities, portions of the other two reserve groups were engaged on the flanks of the defending elements. The American beachhead at Fedala cut off an important portion of the central sector of defense, that from the Nefifikh river to Port-Lyautey, from direct control through Casablanca. During D-Day afternoon, therefore, General Lascroux in Rabat by oral orders assigned command of all French land forces operating in the coastal zone north of the Nefifikh river as far as Port-Lyautey to Gen. Roger Leyer, commander of the Moroccan Cavalry. Special steps in both organization and reinforcement were taken for the defense of Rabat from attacks developing either from Fedala or Port-Lyautey. Troops within the Petitjean section of the general reserve under Gen. Maurice Mathenet started toward Port-Lyautey, and troops from the Khemisset section, toward an assembly area near Les Chênes (east of Salé), where they would be at the disposal of General Leyer.

Late on D Day General Mathenet was ordered by telephone from Rabat to proceed to Port-Lyautey and to assume command of all forces there. General Leyer's mission was thus reduced to defending the coastal zone adjacent to Rabat, including the route to Meknès from the capital.

[10] (1) Interv with Maj Gen Hobart S. Gay, 11 Oct 48. (2) Patton Diary, 9 Nov 42.

American penetration south of Port-Lyautey which was in fact intended to prevent reinforcement of Port-Lyautey by units from Rabat was taken as a threat to the latter. French forces north of Rabat were therefore augmented by shifting troops from south of that city.

Naval Action on D Day

Although the battle for the Fedala–Casablanca area opened when the French on Cherqui and Cap de Fedala fired on the landing forces of the Center Attack Group, the Covering and Air Groups off Casablanca were drawn into combat less than an hour later, at daybreak. The *Massachusetts,* the *Wichita,* and the *Tuscaloosa* catapulted nine seaplanes and steamed along the coast at a range of some 20,000 yards from Casablanca harbor. The *Ranger* and the *Suwannee,* ten miles farther out, began to launch their planes into a light westerly wind during the last minutes of darkness. Daybreak found six spotting planes of the Covering Group ready should bombardment of Casablanca be ordered. Circling at a height of 10,000 feet above the port a squadron of eighteen dive bombers from the *Ranger* prepared to attack any French submarines which tried to leave, or to blast antiaircraft batteries which opened fire. One squadron of fighters from the big carrier was in position to attack the airdromes at Rabat and another to hit Cazes airfield adjacent to Casablanca. The *Suwannee*'s planes protected the vessels off Fedala from air or submarine attack.

A few minutes before 0700 the air and surface naval combat at Casablanca began almost simultaneously. Antiaircraft guns in the harbor opened against one of the observation planes; French fighters started driving other spotting planes out to sea; two French submarines began to leave the port; and a few minutes later the great guns of the *Jean Bart* and the Batterie El Hank fired at the cruisers of the Covering Group. The American warships replied without delay. In less than twenty minutes the *Jean Bart*'s main battery was silenced by damage heavy enough, it later developed, to keep it out of action for about two days. Other salvos fell on the submarine pens in the harbor and on the coastal defense batteries on Table d'Oukacha and El Hank with less success than against the *Jean Bart.* Crews of the coastal guns may have been driven from their stations temporarily, but the guns themselves remained serviceable in the absence of direct hits. Firing from them ceased until the American vessels had been lured within closer range and their attention diverted to other targets.

The air units, which were poised to strike as soon as hostile French intentions became clear, attacked their targets without further hesitation. Their strafing and bombing runs over airfields, and their successful dogfights with French airplanes aloft, won air superiority as far north as Port-Lyautey. They freed the observation planes for spotting, participated in the effort to destroy French naval units at Casablanca, and kept a constant watch for submarines. The French Air Force was reduced quickly to irregular strafing flights by low-flying individual planes over the Fedala beachhead and to preparations for bombing attacks on Safi and Fedala, to be made at first light on 9 November.

At Fedala, not only the coastal guns but French warships had to be overcome by the Center Attack Group. The transport area was only twelve nautical miles from the Casablanca naval base. When the Covering

Group began exchanging shells with the *Jean Bart* and the coastal guns on El Hank, the ships began evasive movements offshore which eventually took them well to the west. The French had an opportunity to send their warships from Casablanca hurrying northward along the coast to attack the Fedala transports.

At 0827 seven destroyers which had made their way out of port behind a smoke screen, undeterred by attacks from the *Ranger*'s planes, opened fire on the American vessels nearest to them, the *Ludlow* and the *Wilkes,* and on some landing craft bringing company L, 7th Infantry, to YELLOW Beach. They hit the *Ludlow* and forced the *Wilkes* to retire toward the cruisers *Augusta* and *Brooklyn*. Then for about half an hour they sought in vain to penetrate the protection afforded to the American transports by those cruisers and by the destroyers *Wilkes* and *Swanson*. When the ships of the Covering Group returned to take up the battle,[11] the French vessels retired to Casablanca, one of them smoking badly.

At 0935 three of the French destroyers tried the same maneuver again while the Covering Group was engaged against other ships in another sector. Again the *Augusta, Brooklyn, Wilkes,* and *Swanson,* aided this time by the *Bristol,* intercepted and frustrated the effort, but not without some minor hits and many close calls, especially from torpedoes. The French cruiser *Primauguet* left Casablanca to support the smaller vessels at about 1015, drawing the Covering Group within range of the coast defense batteries. The action was prolonged until after 1100, when three of the attacking ships came within five miles of the transports before being driven off. Salvos from El Hank's guns, torpedoes from French submarines, and strafing and bombing runs against French ships by American carrier-based planes contributed to the complexity of the morning's naval battle.

One of the French ships, the "destroyer-leader" *Milan,* beached off Roches Noires and burned furiously. Others limped back to port about noon for safety. The cruiser *Primauguet,* badly hit, anchored just outside the entry in the partial shelter of a jetty. To eliminate the vessel, the *Ranger*'s planes assailed her in a series of attacks early in the afternoon. They started uncontrollable fires, drove her men overboard, and forced her to try to beach. A destroyer near her had the same experience. Both ships smouldered all night, while from the *Primauguet's* magazine ammunition explosions could be heard for another day.[12]

Naval combat off Casablanca during the remainder of 8 November eliminated almost all threat by French surface ships to the performance of the transports' mission. Providential escape from scores of straddling salvos continued to assist the Covering Group, while alert seamanship prevented well-aimed French torpedoes from finding their marks. Naval bombardment had failed, however, to silence for long the coastal batteries of El Hank which were still operating at nightfall.

Unloading at Fedala on D Day

To unload the 15,000 long tons of cargo from the transports strained available facilities beyond capacity, although the task was attempted with persistence and resourceful-

[11] The *Massachusetts* opened fire at a range of 19,400 yards at 0918.

[12] (1) Account by observer on roof overlooking Casablanca harbor. In private possession. (2) Jnl and Rpt, Ajax to Reid, 22 Nov 42. In private possession. (3) Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations,* II, Ch. IV.

ness. The transports' crews were of unequal efficiency.[13]

The Army shore parties included so large a proportion of specialists or combat engineers who turned to other duties during the operation that Navy working parties, which were organized from ships' crews and sent ashore to handle cargo, in several instances outnumbered Army elements.[14] The same policy that deferred service troops to later convoys in order to increase the number of combat troops for the assault had also given priority to combat vehicles over other types, so that automotive transport was trimmed down severely. The shortage was felt at once in moving matériel inland to dumps. Loss of landing craft drastically reduced total capacity. While the exact number of the boats either temporarily or permanently out of service is not certain, an inspection during the morning of 10 November showed 162 stranded along the bay and 23 others reported farther east.[15] Of these at least 16 were tank lighters.

The unloading process was slowed down not only by lack of carrying capacity—but also by emergency requests for matériel which had been lost in the first attempt to land. The resulting interference with the orderly removal from ships' holds of matériel which had been combat loaded was responsible for retarding the process.

Engineer officers were held on their transports until long after the time when, by reconnaissance of beaches and docks, they could most effectively have organized the engineers' operations there. To each shore party engineer company, two bulldozers and four amphibian tractors (LVT's) were allotted. With the former, exits were cleared through sand dunes and other obstructions, and vehicles were towed across terrain too soft for traction. When unloading shifted from the beaches to the port, most of the bulldozers were diverted to towing supplies to dumps, rather than aiding in boat salvage operations. Amphibian tractors proved helpful in getting stranded craft afloat but suffered too often from mechanical failures.[16]

The planners of Sub-Task Force BRUSHWOOD estimated Fedala's port capacity at 800 tons per day, since along the quays at the northern edge of the harbor there was space for only two ships. Except for one anchorage, the remainder of the harbor was too shallow for cargo transports. If calm seas should enable other transport vessels to moor near the harbor entrance and send their cargoes in on small craft, perhaps 1,000 tons per day could be unloaded. Railroad sidings and approaches for trucks were so restricted that, even with additional cranes, it would not be possible to transfer matériel from

[13] Two were characterized as "smart, experienced, well-trained"; five of them, as "fairly well-trained"; three, as "well-converted but totally inexperienced in amphibious operations"; and the remaining five, as "partially and hastily converted, totally inexperienced in amphibious operations." CTG 34.9 Action Rpt, 30 Nov 42, App. 1, Incl C, Ser 003052.

[14] *Leonard Wood, Thomas Jefferson, Charles Carroll, Joseph T. Dickman, Joseph Hewes,* and *Edward Rutledge* had joint shore and beach parties consisting of 170 Army and 46 Navy personnel. The *William P. Biddle* had a shore party of 45 plus a signal detachment, and a party of 28. *Ibid.*

[15] The lowest figure seems to be an expenditure of 40 percent of all craft during the whole operation, 137 boats out of 347 used. Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations,* II, 79n.

[16] (1) WTF Final Rpt, Annex 8, App. 1, p. 1. (2) *Joseph T. Dickman* War Diary, Nov 42, Account of Harry A. Storts. (3) The great value of amphibian tractors for landings in the shallow water over coral reefs in the Central Pacific was to be demonstrated in such operations as the capture of the Gilbert and the Marshall Islands about a year later. See Philip A. Crowl and Edmund G. Love, *The Seizure of the Gilberts and Marshalls,* UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II (Washington, 1955).

lighters to vehicles fast enough to meet the situation. The stuff would simply pile up. Warehouse facilities, moreover, were very small.

The matériel brought ashore along the bay during the first morning of the operation was handled under intermittent shelling from Cap de Fedala and recurrent strafing runs by French planes. Small dumps for ammunition, water, rations, and gasoline were established, but stocks accumulated very slowly. In midafternoon, after Cap de Fedala had been occupied, the port was surveyed by the sub-task force supply officer and shore party commander and discovered to be usable at once. The harbor master and two pilots were sent under guard to the *Leonard Wood* to confer with Captain Emmett concerning the use of the port. The beachmaster, Comdr. J. W. Jamison USN), reconnoitering on foot, found the rising surf pounding most severely on the eastern section of the bay. He attempted to consolidate all beach landings at the most sheltered point during the later part of the afternoon. The absence of lateral communications between the beaches frustrated his attempt. But the transports could move closer in, thus shortening the ship-to-shore round trips and expediting the arrival of units and matériel needed to balance and strengthen the attacking force approaching Casablanca. At 1700 although some 39 percent of all troops (including 90 percent of the four assault battalions and of BLT 3–7) went ashore, only 16 percent of the vehicles and merely 1.1 percent of the supplies had been landed. The lack of vehicular transport precluded any systematic resupply of the forward elements. Equally restricting, some pieces of the light artillery batteries, some of the self-propelled 105's, and the heavy equipment of the cannon companies had not been landed. While the troops and trucks at the beaches prepared to labor during the night to get matériel inland and under cover in anticipation of a dawn attack from the air, General Anderson concluded that the advance of ground troops had to be restrained until a better balance had been achieved.

He directed RLG's 7 and 15 to stop at a line about two miles west of the Mellah river, a limit almost three miles short of the original D-Day objective. RLG 30 was ordered to continue organizing positions from which to protect the Fedala area after the other two regiments (reinforced) resumed the advance toward Casablanca at 0700 next day. A preliminary outline plan of attack on the final objective was given to the regimental commanders. During the remainder of D Day, while elements of Colonel Monroe's 15th RLG kept arriving at various beaches, the battalions of Colonel Macon's 7th RLG took up positions preparatory to the next day's attack southwestward. Losses reported for the day had been moderate, 20 killed and 128 wounded, of which the 7th Infantry lost 9 killed and 38 wounded; the 15th Infantry, 3 killed and 13 wounded; the 30th Infantry, 8 killed and 23 wounded; and other units, the remainder.[17]

After General Patton had inspected the town and port of Fedala, he authorized a military police unit there, in the rear of Force BRUSHWOOD, composed of both American and French elements, and with a French officer acting as assistant provost marshal. Patton remained for the night at the Hotel Miramar, from which some of the German control commissioners had fled in the morning, in order to keep close track

[17] WTF Final Rpt, Annex 2, p. 18.

of Force BRUSHWOOD's operations at this critical stage. The report from General Harmon's attack at Safi was reassuring. News from Mehdia–Port-Lyautey was not so good. But the most pressing problem appeared to be that of speeding up the inflow of matériel from the transports off Fedala so that General Anderson's force could expedite its advance on Casablanca.

The Advance on 9 November

The first day's operations to secure the beachhead were followed on D plus 1 by an attempt to move into positions for a coordinated attack on Casablanca to be made on the third day ashore. The beachhead was protected against a threatened counterattack while the advance toward the outskirts of Casablanca proceeded, unsupported by land-based air, without the Armored Landing Team, and seriously hampered by logistical difficulties.

General Patton, up before daylight on 9 November, went almost at once to check the situation at the beach. He considered it "a mess," with leadership negligent. He personally ordered a launch sent out to intercept the boats and to direct them into the port instead of letting them ride to the beach through the towering surf. The Army shore parties seemed to him neither energetic nor resourceful in moving the matériel already on the beach. In a state of exasperated frustration over the slackness which he observed and over some cases of fright during a French air attack about 0800, he remained on the beach until after noon. He then returned to the *Augusta* to see Admiral Hewitt and sent his deputy commander, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes, and most of the staff ashore.[18] Advanced Headquarters, Western Task Force, was set up in the Hotel Miramar, and command responsibility for Operation TORCH in Morocco passed by mutual understanding from Admiral Hewitt to General Patton when he returned to shore later that afternoon. Command over operations ashore had been exercised by the general from the very beginning and was to be exercised by Admiral Hewitt over naval operations henceforth, in conformity with the provisions of their directives.[19]

Communication between the Western Task Force and the Allied command post at Gibraltar remained meager. Radio contact with Gibraltar was established on 9 November (by Company C, 829th Signal Service Battalion), but traffic was at first badly confused by a hostile station which posed to each of the authentic stations as the other and, when an effective authenticator system was improvised, interfered effectively by jamming. Communications with Oran were established on 10 November,[20] and some use was made of a new radio station set up at Fedala by the Office of Strategic Services and Special Operations Executive which was operated by a British team in touch with Gibraltar.[21]

Force BRUSHWOOD headquarters ashore shifted to the Fedala schoolhouse in time to open there at 0900, 9 November. The

[18] Patton Diary, 9 Nov 42.

[19] (1) Patton Diary, 9 Nov 42. (2) Intervs with Adm Hewitt, 23 Jan 51, and Capt L. A. Bachman (USN), 16 Jan 51. (3) Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations,* II, 158, is in error concerning the circumstances. Control from the *Augusta* over the separate operations at Safi and Port-Lyautey had been severely restricted by the inadequacy of communications facilities on the *Augusta* for the unexpected volume of Army traffic.

[20] WTF Final Rpt, Annex 9, p. 3. SCR–188 and SCR–199 sets were used.

[21] (1) OSS Rpt, TORCH and the SOE Signals Stations at Gibraltar. CIA OSS Archives. (2) Msg, London to AGWAR, 21 Oct 42, CM-IN 09055. (3) Ltr, Frederick P. Culbert to author, 12 Feb 48.



ASSEMBLY AREA, AFTERNOON OF D PLUS 1. *Men are from the 3d Infantry Division.*

239th Signal Operation Company manned the French telephone switchboard in Fedala and provided commercial circuits to the units approaching Casablanca. No other wire communications were available, for no field wire or related equipment had yet been landed.[22]

At 0700 General Anderson's force began the second day's advance on a four-battalion front. The 7th Infantry's zone was on the right (north) and the 15th Infantry's zone on the left. From north to south the four BLT's were BLT's 3–7 (Maj. Eugene H. Cloud), 2–7 (Salzmann), 2–15 (Maj. William H. Billings), and 1–15 (Gardner). BLT 1–7 (Moore), which had been relieved in Fedala at 0600 by the 2d Battalion, 20th Combat Engineers, moved up behind BLT 2–7 as regimental reserve. BLT 3–15 was in a similar role behind BLT 2–15. The perimeter of the enlarged bridgehead was held on the southeast by BLT 1–30 and on the east and northeast by BLT 2–30 and the reinforced 41st Field Artillery Battalion. BLT 3–30, with one platoon of the 443d Coast Artillery (AA) attached, prepared to move westward from a point near Beach RED 3 during the morning to a new assembly area nearer the front. To aid the main attack in the 7th Infantry's zone, Companies A and C, 756th Tank Battalion, were also attached. Colonel Macon's (7th) and Colonel Monroe's (15th) regimental

[22] WTF Final Rpt, Annex 9, p. 3 (Col Elton F. Hammond, Signal Officer, WTF).

command posts were moved up to points about a mile east of the line of departure.[23]

The *Ranger* had aboard three cub observation airplanes for General Campbell's Force BRUSHWOOD artillery, which were to be sent ashore when the three battalions of field artillery, each reinforced by an extra battery of self-propelled 105's, had enough weapons ashore, and when a suitable landing field became available. In midafternoon of 9 November, when the troops were approaching Casablanca, these aircraft were launched from the carrier's deck with instructions to land at the Fedala race track. Their route brought them too near the Center Attack Group so that they became the target of heavy fire from the *Brooklyn* and from some of the transports. Escaping miraculously from their peril, they crossed the beach under determined fire from friendly antiaircraft batteries. One aircraft was shot down with serious injuries to its pilot; the others landed safely but received no fire control missions prior to the French capitulation.[24]

The movement toward Casablanca by RLG's 7 and 15, and by BLT 3–30 (BRUSHWOOD reserve), with one platoon of the 443d Coast Artillery (AA) attached, was lightly resisted, with occasional strafing by low-flying French aircraft. BLT 2–30 held the front along the steep-sided Nefifikh river on the northeastern edge of the beachhead against mounting threats of a counterattack by mobile armored forces from the directions of Rabat or Boulhaut. A French reconnaissance patrol along the Rabat–Casablanca highway was driven off during the morning, and early in the afternoon an armored force of some thirty vehicles at the intersection of that highway with the Fedala–Boulhaut road was dispersed by a naval air attack.[25] Defensive measures at the critical crossing of the Nefifikh included mining the approaches and the bridges, while artillery surveyed and checked concentrations, and planes patrolled the approaching roads. But the defenders of Rabat actually shifted their major strength on 9 November northward toward Port-Lyautey instead of getting ready for a counterblow toward Fedala.

Although the defenders of Casablanca failed to come out in force on 9 November to meet the invaders approaching from Fedala, the advance was stopped as completely as if by a pitched battle. For General Anderson again had to halt the progress of his assault battalions until they had enough supporting weapons, transportation, and communications equipment. The 7th RLG was fairly well off except for radios for the supporting 10th Field Artillery Battalion—equipment which had been lost or damaged in landing. The 15th RLG, on the other hand, lacked the weapons of its Cannon Company, the self-propelled 105's of Battery B, 9th Field Artillery Battalion, the self-propelled 37-mm. antiaircraft guns of the 443d Coast Artillery (AA), and all the transportation of the 39th Field Artillery Battalion. A jeep was all that had been available to haul one battery of field artillery. Five more of the little quarter-ton vehicles were the total transport of the 15th RLG as

[23] Each of the nineteen antiaircraft platoons operated four half-tracked multiple gun motor carriers, mounting one 37-mm. automatic gun and two .50-caliber fixed machine guns. The 5th Platoon, Battery D, had only two of these (WTF Final Rpt, Annex 7, p. 3). The multiple gun motor carriers were credited with shooting down nine planes in three areas, four of them at Fedala (WTF Final Rpt, Annex 11, p. 3).

[24] WTF Final Rpt, Annex 7, p. 6.

[25] The vehicles were from the scout car troop, 1st Squadron, 1st Regiment, African Chasseurs, according to WTF Final Rpt, G–2 Annex, Item 11.



ENTRANCE TO THE PORT OF FEDALA. *Landing craft are from the close-in transport area.*

late as 1800 hours. To stop the advance for long, it was believed, might result in forfeiting an early French capitulation which an immediate strong show of force was likely to produce. Advance was resumed, therefore, at midnight, 9–10 November, with transportation furnished to RLG 15 by RLG 30 for moving the 39th Field Artillery Battalion and for resupply of ammunition.

Unloading improved for various reasons on 9 November. Four docks and two paved, inclined slips in Fedala port were found to be usable. The slips served as excellent places for disembarking vehicles from ramped lighters. The dock normally used by trawlers in the southeastern corner of the port became the center of greatest activity. A railway ran along the full length of this dock, and the contents of the boats could be transferred directly into freight cars that were found there.

At 1100 the transports moved inshore again, and the *Arcturus* was piloted into the harbor and moored at the tankers' dock. By 1430, vehicles of the 1st Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment, were being swung ashore. At the same time a captured French trawler began taking ashore about 200 men per trip from the *Thurston,* supplementing the unending activity of the few landing craft and their exhausted crews. On the trawlers' dock, a station was organized for evacuating casualties to the transports. Medical personnel from the beach parties concentrated

there. From the Army's collecting station in the Casino, about 400 yards away, they carried the wounded by litter to the dock for removal to the sick bays of the ships off shore.

The pace of unloading, which surf conditions had slowed down severely for eighteen hours, was quickened that afternoon. At 1700 the convoy had discharged 55 percent of the personnel, 31 percent of the vehicles, and 3.3 percent of the supplies which it had brought from the United States. Accelerated operations were in prospect for the next twenty-four hours as a result of salvaging landing craft, the close-in anchorage of the transports, the extra port facilities, and improving sea conditions. Transport of every sort was being requisitioned and put into service to clear beaches and docks. On the trawlers' quay, ammunition of many kinds, gasoline in five-gallon cans, TNT demolition charges, bangalore torpedoes, and other inflammable matériel were piling up. A well-placed bomb could be disastrous. Men and vehicles worked without stint to segregate and disperse the fuel and ammunition, although hampered by continued uncertainty as to the location of the different dumps. Their labors not only improved the security of the port but made possible a renewed attack on Casablanca.

French Countermeasures in Morocco, 9–10 November

To contain the Americans at the coast after their occupation of Safi, Port-Lyautey, Fedala, and possibly Casablanca, General Noguès (charged by Admiral Darlan at 1735, 8 November, and by Vichy next day with control of operations in western Algeria as well as Morocco) on 10 November prescribed a defense along certain inland routes rather than along a north-south front.[26] Small reserve groups of French troops assembled on 9–10 November at Petitjean and Khemisset from Fès and Taza, and others went to Marrakech from the Agadir sector. Orders from General Lascroux's headquarters placed General Dody, commanding general of the Meknès Division, in charge of defending the inland route to Meknès from Port-Lyautey and, in co-operation with the Fès Division, the route via Petitjean to Fès, while General Leyer had the mission of blocking the route from Rabat to Meknès.[27]

General Noguès moved his command post to Fès on 9 November, and General Lascroux later moved part of his headquarters there but remained himself at a command post in Khemisset. The German Armistice Commissioners had been kept informed of developments by General Noguès through liaison officers after the attack began but had been denied permission to keep a representative at his headquarters. They followed him inland, and concluded that his course of action, although somewhat inconsistent, was primarily intended to discourage German intervention. He flatly opposed the arrival of German aircraft to support the defense of Morocco. He promised the commissioners that they might leave by air if, as conditions then indicated, the Americans gained control from the French. Later, when the Germans violated the armistice by invading southern France, he did allow the commissioners to leave.[28]

[26] General Directive 106–CMC, according to WTF Final Rpt, G–2 Annex, Item 11.

[27] GO 30/3, *ibid.*

[28] (1) Extract of Rpt, *Bericht ueber die Vorgaenge in Franzoesisch-Marroko und Nordafrika vom 8.–11.XI.1942, DWStK, Kontrollinspektion Afrika Ia, Nr. 150/42,* 15 Nov 42, in *Chef OKW, Sonderakte Vorgaenge Frankreich.* (2) Ltrs, Noguès to author, 28 Jan 50 and 23 Jan 51.

The resources of the French Army in northern Morocco were assembled and deployed for resistance either to an American drive to the northeast or to an attack from Spanish Morocco against the northern frontier.

The Attack Near the Coast on 10 November

The 7th RLG started forward again at midnight, 9–10 November, under increased shelling from field guns in the outskirts of Casablanca, still carrying heavy loads of ammunition and weapons, and very weary. Nearest the beach, the reinforced Company L, 7th Infantry, proceeded without interruption, pushing back small French units. The remainder of BLT 3–7, straddling the coastal road about 1,500 yards inland, reached the suburbs of Casablanca not long after daybreak but was stopped there by French artillery and by small arms which swept the open terrain in front of them.

The fighting on 10 November was the hottest experienced by Force BRUSHWOOD. After two halts for supporting arms to be brought forward, the troops resumed their movement at midnight to get into position for the co-ordinated action scheduled to start at 0700. RLG 7 headed for a line of departure running generally south-southwest from a point on the coast just east of Table d'Oukacha to the Camp de la Jonquière, and thence southwestward generally following the Route de Grande Ceinture that skirts Casablanca. RLG 15 was to move southwestward to heights on either side of the Casablanca–Marrakech road. The French had organized their defense in a perimeter extending from Table d'Oukacha, including Roches Noires, Camp de la Jonquière, then following the Route de Grande Ceinture to a point about three miles south of the harbor, and from there in a northwesterly loop at El Hank. They had strengthened their defenses by an artillery concentration against attacks from the east and south and reinforced their lines with survivors of French warships previously sunk. Outer positions were located at Aïn Sebaâ and at the Tit Mellil crossroads. Finally, they had arranged for naval gunfire support of their troops nearest the coast whenever an opportunity to slip lighter naval vessels out of Casablanca harbor presented itself. The 7th RLG, with its designated line of departure for the 0700 attack actually in the rear of the forward French positions, was advancing into a sector that would be warmly defended. The 15th RLG's route of approach led through the outpost defenses of Tit Mellil, which the French had had time to prepare and which were not to be readily taken; it also passed through an area under artillery fire from some of the Casablanca batteries.[29]

On the north, closest the shore, platoons from Companies I and K of RLG 7 in their advance north of the coastal road captured a 90-mm. antiaircraft battery about 1,200 yards southeast of Table d'Oukacha during the morning, but the rest of the battalion was immobilized and for some hours out of communication with the regimental command post.

Colonel Salzmann's BLT 2–7 moved along the Rabat–Casablanca highway as far as the railroad underpass at the edge of Aïn Sebaâ, and from that point continued along a branch road on the southern side of the railroad embankment. In column of companies, the battalion arrived about half an hour before daylight near its designated por-

[29] (1) See overlays in WTF Final Rpt, Annex 2, Incls 6 and 7. (2) Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations*, II, 162.

tion of the line of departure for the attack which was to begin at 0700, 10 November. Small arms and artillery fire on the area then stopped the advance. The BLT deployed on either side of the road in some confusion. Two company commanders were casualties, some platoons failed to receive orders, and the battalion was split into three parts. Salzmann led the bulk of the unit under fire to the south flank in order to reach higher ground. Several platoons from the three rifle companies and most of the Headquarters Company remained behind. Part of the Headquarters Company and the battalion executive officer first took cover wherever they could find it in nearby buildings and then, when enemy fire let up, pulled back to the eastern outskirts of Aïn Sebaâ. Eventually they organized a line of defense for the 10th Field Artillery Battalion, 1,200 yards back of the railroad underpass. Others also straggled back and were put in this line, but the forward elements of the battalion, consisting of two platoons of Company E and one platoon from Company G, stood their ground in contact with the enemy. They captured one field piece and drove the crews from two others, and even tried to envelop the northern flank of the French line. This attempt was frustrated by the lack of cover. The platoon of Company G which tried it was driven to the shelter of the railroad embankment by artillery and naval gunfire, and during the early afternoon it joined the defensive line organized earlier by the battalion executive officer.

The 10th Field Artillery Battalion, with Battery A, 9th Field Artillery Battalion, attached, outdistanced the infantry advance between midnight and dawn to reach positions previously reconnoitered in Aïn Sebaâ. The artillerymen got ready for the 0700 attack, but then, almost as soon as their guns opened fire, they came under heavy counterbattery fire from 75-mm. and 90-mm. guns, the latter only 800 yards distant on the north flank. Machine gun fire and hand grenade attacks by enemy infantry harried the gun crews and caused ten casualties, among them Lt. Col. Kermit LeV. Davis, the battalion commanding officer. Between 0930 and 1100, the battalion, lacking infantry protection, dropped hastily back to new positions more than 1,000 yards to the east. It resumed firing about an hour before noon and continued throughout the afternoon, protected by the fragment of BLT 2–7 described above and under direct orders from regimental headquarters, after direct communications with it were restored at noon.[30]

For a short time late in the morning the 100-mm. guns and heavy machine guns of two French corvettes supported the French defensive line near the coast by enfilading fire on BLT 2–7. Moving slowly only a short distance offshore in the vicinity of Table d'Oukacha, they kept firing until an attack by the *Augusta* and four destroyers drove them back into Casablanca harbor. The episode lured the *Augusta* within range of the guns of the *Jean Bart,* which had been repaired after being reported wholly out of action. Unexpected fire subjected the American flagship to a series of very close straddles. The shelling from the corvettes at first had been misinterpreted by the troops as from American ships, and contributed to the decision by some of the retreating units to shift position to the east.

At 1045 Colonel Moore's BLT 1–7 began moving into the line on regimental order. It was directed to advance with tank and

[30] (1) Ltr, Patton to Marshall, 15 Nov 42. Copy in OPD Exec 8, Bk. 7, Tab 5. (2) Interv with Lt Gen Geoffrey Keyes, 15 Feb 50.

artillery support through the zone of Colonel Salzmann's battalion to take the French military barracks at Camp de la Jonquière on the outskirts of Casablanca. The BLT made good progress under persistent artillery fire until, at 1700, it was barely 400 yards east of its objective and about one and one-half miles in advance of BLT 2–7. There it stopped for the night. French prisoners reported that they had received orders to fall back; an armistice was imminent.

Pushing to the Southeastern Edge of Casablanca, 10 November

Late on 9 November in the zone of Colonel Monroe's 15th RLG reconnaissance patrols discovered an organized French position of uncertain strength in a village near Tit Mellil. The night march past this position to a line of departure for the 0700 attack was therefore postponed until the French position could be cleared by a daylight attack. Supporting artillery fire was requested. One battery of the 39th Field Artillery Battalion using a jeep and a French civilian truck came forward to assist the attack at dawn. BLT 1–15 and BLT 2–15 then met heavy rifle and machine gun fire coming from the waiting defenders who occupied several concrete buildings and who appeared to be strongly organized in some depth. Neither the Cannon Company nor the Antitank Company of RLG 15 had yet been landed from the transports, but some 37-mm. antitank guns were used to good purpose as assault guns, while the heavy machine guns and 81-mm. mortars of all three battalions were also employed effectively. Following an earlier admonition from General Patton, to "grab the enemy by the nose and kick him in the pants," the regiment enveloped the village from both flanks under covering artillery fire. The French retired to the south and west, and were pushed back from the ridge of Er Refifida (135)* by heavy machine gun and 37-mm. high explosive fire. But it was 1700 instead of 0700 hours when the regiment arrived at the line, astride the Casablanca–Marrakech highway and south of BLT 1–7, from which to attack the main objective.

RLG's 7 and 15 had reached the edge of Casablanca late on 10 November at a cost of 27 killed and 72 wounded in the 7th Infantry, 2 killed and 6 wounded in the 10th Field Artillery Battalion, and 11 wounded in the 15th Infantry. Losses in other units raised the Force BRUSHWOOD total for the day to 36 killed and 113 wounded,[31] chiefly because of French artillery and machine guns. The day's operations had been as costly as those on D Day. The interloping enemy aircraft of previous days had dwindled to very few indeed, while the support by land-based aircraft from Port-Lyautey was still withheld because of delay in capturing the airfield there. If the reports from Port-Lyautey were not too hopeful, the situation between Fedala and Casablanca had improved in two important respects. The supply situation no longer restrained the advance, for the famine at the port of Fedala had been transformed into a glut by unloading at a rate far in excess of the capacity of the men and available transportation to clear the docks. A substantial number of trucks and the use of the railroad had made possible the stocking of forward dumps. And even ahead of the trucks, the

*Figures in parentheses refer to elevation in meters.

[31] WTF Final Rpt, Annex 2, p. 18.

Armored Landing Team 1–67 (Major Nelson) had been put ashore from the *Arcturus* and assembled five and a half miles southwest of Fedala, except for one platoon of light tanks of A Company sent forward to the southern flank of the 15th Infantry in the area of the Tit Mellil.

General Patton could get little information from either General Truscott or General Harmon, but, urged by General Eisenhower to catch up with the operations at Algiers and Oran,[32] where fighting had already ceased, he determined to proceed without the support of P–40's from the XII Air Support Command or the medium tanks of Combat Command B, 2d Armored Division, from Safi. The French forces in Casablanca were believed to outnumber available ground troops, but naval air and naval gunfire could be counted on to offset that advantage. Arrangements for a co-ordinated attack to open with bombardment at 0700 and ground assault at 0730, 11 November, were made during the afternoon and evening. While these plans were maturing, reports were received that General Harmon's medium tanks were moving northward from Safi and that the airfield at Port-Lyautey had been taken in time to receive some of the *Chenango*'s P–40's.[33] General Truscott, who had been asking for reinforcements in the morning, was already planning to send a small armored force southward to get the airfield at Rabat on 11 November.[34]

From four of the transports between 2030 on 10 November and dawn on 11 November, the personnel and heavy guns of two artillery batteries, the personnel and equipment of the 3d Signal Company, and the signal and medical equipment of some armored units were landed under urgent request. These units were to strengthen RLG 30 to meet an anticipated morning attack against the Fedala beachhead from the northeast.

General Anderson notified his assault units of the attack orders in prospect for the next morning in time for reconnaissance before darkness. Ground advance was to begin at 0730, following preliminary bombardment in which warships, carrier-based planes, and field artillery would join. El Hank, the water front, and the semicircle of field and antiaircraft guns in the southeastern sector of Casablanca, were the designated targets. RLG 7 on the north, RLG 15 on the east, supported respectively by the 10th and 39th Field Artillery Battalions (reinforced), and the tanks of the 1st Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment, in RLG 15's sector, were to attack toward the harbor along converging lines. Movements during the night placed the various components of Sub-Task Force BRUSHWOOD in position for the morning's attack.

Facing the attacking force, the French ground elements, exclusive of the personnel at the coastal defense batteries which were still in operation, amounted to more than 3,600 infantry, about 90 guns, and miscellaneous provisional naval units of undetermined strength. A troop of some 400 Moroccan Spahis was stationed southwest of the city and south of the Route de Grande Ceinture within striking distance of RLG 15's left flank and likely to engage the tanks of the 2d Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment. The measures necessary to overcome such defenses with the means available seemed certain to cause drastic destruction within the city and its harbor, and to do

[32] CinC AF Diary, 10 Nov 42.
[33] Patton Diary, 10 Nov 42.
[34] Interv with Brig Gen Harry H. Semmes (O.R.C.), 7 Mar 50.

irreparable damage to any prospect of cooperation between Americans and French in defeating the Axis. Would the French resistance persist? Could Noguès be persuaded to order the cessation of hostilities, and if he did, would his orders be obeyed? He had finally recognized that the Western Task Force was formidable—no raiding party—and that even at Mehdia–Port-Lyautey, where the French opposition had been most successful, the triumph of the invaders was in sight.

CHAPTER VIII

Mehdia to Port-Lyautey

The basic task of Force GOALPOST in executing its mission was to gain possession of an airfield for the use of P–40's (brought on the carrier *Chenango*) and other planes of the XII Air Support Command (to be flown from Gibraltar).[1] The airfield was to be available by nightfall of D Day for support thereafter of the main American attack on Casablanca. Although the northern force might well accomplish other missions, capture of the airport near Port-Lyautey was primary and overriding. The operations from Mehdia to Port-Lyautey were more complex than those of either of the other two landing forces. (*Map III*)

The Sebou river meanders in wide loops as it near the Atlantic coast at Mehdia. Parallel protective moles jut into the sea at its mouth. Nine miles upstream around a great northerly loop, although only five miles airline to the eastward, is Port-Lyautey, on the southern bank of the river. The area within the inverted U made by this loop contains, in its southern portion, the prominent northern nose of a ridge which extends southwestward, roughly parallel to the seacoast. In the flat northeastern part of the area is the Port-Lyautey airdrome, its concrete runways and hangars lying on low flats next to the river. It is dominated by the high ground to the southwest and, across the river, directly to the north, by bluffs rising about 100 feet above the water.

It was not feasible for ships to bypass the defenses at the river's mouth and navigate upstream to the vicinity of the airfield before debarking the troops who were to occupy it. A sandbar at the entrance limited access, even during the highest November tides, to vessels of not more than nineteen feet draft. About one mile from the mouth, a barrier across the channel prevented farther navigation except with the concurrence of guards. Machine guns and artillery were sited to sweep the river adjacent to the barrier. On the shoulder of a mesa south of the stream, the walled Kasba (fortress) in particular dominated the channel. Ships attempting to proceed past these defenses in daylight would be at too severe a disadvantage, while at night their chances of escaping the misfortune of running aground were slight.

If troops started inland from the ocean shore south of the Sebou river, their advance would be impeded by a narrow lagoon almost four miles in length, fringed by scrub pine woods and steep ridges, which paralleled the coast east of the dunes. Movement of vehicles would have to be funneled through a gap of less than one mile between the lagoon's marshy northern end and the southern bank of the river. This gap, more-

[1] The chief sources for the operations at Mehdia–Port-Lyautey are: (1) WTF Final Rpt, Operations TORCH, Annex 3 (Opns of Sub-Task Force GOALPOST), and G–2 Annex, Item 11 (Journal of Actions of the High Command of Moroccan Troops, 8–11 Nov 42). DRB AGO. (2) TG 34.8 Action Rpt. (3) Maj Carl E. Bledsoe, AGF Obsr's Rpt, 27 Jan 43. AGF 319.1 (For. Obs), Tab 17.



PORT-LYAUTEY AIRDROME, *within the "U" made by the wide loop of the Sebou river.*

over, narrowed abruptly to a terrace less than 200 yards wide between the river and a cliff. Troops drawn into this gap would be faced by the strongest concentration of fixed defenses in the area to be attacked. Among them, indeed, were the principal coastal defense guns, which would have to be neutralized or captured before the transports could operate in daylight from positions near the beaches. These batteries were believed to consist of one four-gun and an adjacent two-gun group, each of 138.6-mm. caliber, heavily protected by machine guns, anti-aircraft weapons, and a system of trenches linking the area with the Kasba fortress. The older battery of four guns was understood to be mounted without the protection characteristic of newer emplacements, but all had a range of up to 18,000 meters and a traverse which enabled them to cover sea and beach approaches to the Sebou from any likely angle.

Another gap at the southern end of the long lagoon permitted access to the interior where a coastal road turned inland. This defile through the coastal ridges was not

more than 200 yards wide and was a position of easy defense against any force approaching Mehdia. The bluffs extending south of this narrow gap for over four miles contained a few exits for roads or trails. Through these draws and across the inland ridges, infantry units could at least approach the airfield from the southwest, passing between Mehdia on the west and Port-Lyautey on the east.

The airfield could be attacked also by a force which landed north of the river mouth. These troops would have to advance for at least 1,500 yards through high sand dunes, over steep shale slopes and ridges, to reach a secondary road along the river's northern bank. Part of such a force could occupy the bluffs directly north of the airdrome and the remainder could move down a tongue of land within the river's second loop to the east. The airport could thus be denied to the enemy, but in order to make it available to the Americans, the high ground southwest of it would also have to be held. Supplies, moreover, would have to be brought upstream. Control of the river from its mouth to Port-Lyautey required landings south of the river and inland advance by the few routes permitted by the difficult natural barriers paralleling the coast.

General Truscott and his staff recognized the possibility of making the assault in either of two general ways. All landings could be made to the south away from effective opposition; the attacking force, including a considerable number of guns and tanks, could assemble there and advance northward to the airdrome and the port under cover of naval bombardment. Such a method involved two great risks: slowness in reaching the objective, and interruption by bad weather in landing tanks and guns after the assault infantry was ashore, thus preventing the force from moving northward in good order. It was rejected, therefore, in favor of a landing plan which would make maximum use of a short period when the surf was moderate, and which seemed to combine the advantages of speed, surprise, and flexibility. Landings were to be made at several places as close as possible to the objective and, during the inland advance, success was to be exploited wherever it might be achieved. Numerical superiority over the defenders would not be guaranteed at every point, nor could sufficient reinforcements be committed from one side of the river to the other if needed to turn the tide of battle. The separated units would have to operate with a high degree of initiative and efficiency. The risk that the attack might get out of control was great. But the prospects of speedy success and of insurance against swiftly deteriorating weather were deemed controlling.

Port-Lyautey and the Port-Lyautey airdrome would be defended on D Day, the planners concluded, by one infantry regiment (3,080 men) with supporting artillery. These troops could be reinforced, late on D Day, by 1,200 mechanized cavalry and elements of a tank battalion (forty-five tanks) from Rabat. During the night, about half an additional tank battalion could reach the area from Meknès. Finally, within five days, two regiments (about 6,200 men) could march to Port-Lyautey from Rabat and Meknès. These troops, while not as well equipped as the Americans, would include a substantial proportion of seasoned veterans. To meet the contingencies of D Day, the assaulting units would require antitank weapons and tanks, some of them landing south of the Sebou river to confront

French armored units approaching from Rabat. Limited by the capacities of available transports, and the necessity of conveying ground troops of the XII Air Support Command, the northern landing force would consist of only one regimental combat team, the 60th Regiment (reinforced), and an armored group, the 3d Armored Landing Team of the 2d Armored Division. Persistent hopes of having an airborne force dropped near the airfield were denied.

The Plan of Attack

Force GOALPOST was conveyed to the vicinity of Mehdia by the Northern Attack Group of the Western Naval Task Force. Its 525 officers and warrant officers and 8,554 enlisted men [2] (of whom 124 officers and 1,757 enlisted men were ground troops of the XII Air Support Command), with 65 light tanks and 881 vehicles, were loaded in eight transports. They were protected by the battleship *Texas,* the light cruiser *Savannah,* the escort carrier *Sangamon,* and nine destroyers. Two mine sweepers, an oiler, and a seaplane tender were part of the group, and the S.S. *Contessa,* the special cargo transport, pursued the others across the Atlantic in time to join them off Mehdia on D Day. The *Chenango,* on which the Army's seventy-six P–40's were carried, was prepared to catapult them for emergency strikes followed by landings in the open countryside, should such drastic action be required.

To insure at least a skeleton staff arriving at the destination, General Truscott had divided his staff, placing half abroad the USS *Allen* and half aboard the USS *Clymer.* Assignment was as follows:

USS *Allen*

Section	*Rank and Name*
Commanding General	Maj. Gen. Lucian K. Truscott, Jr.
Chief of Staff	Col. Don E. Carleton
G–1	Lt. Col. Oliver T. Sanborn, Jr.
Assistant G–2	Maj. Theodore J. Conway
G–3	Lt. Col. Van H. Bond
G–4	Lt. Col. Donald M. Libby
Air Officer	Col. Demas T. Craw
Signal Officer	Capt. John C. Liggett
Surgeon	Maj. Ralph R. Camardella

USS *Clymer*

2d in Command	Col. Frederick J. de Rohan
Assistant Chief of Staff	Lt. Col. William R. McCleod
G–2	Maj. Pierpont M. Hamilton
Assistant G–3	Maj. Carl E. Bledsoe
Assistant G–4	Capt. William S. McKowsky
Assistant Air Officer	Lt. Col. Charles A. Piddock
Engineer Officer	Lt. Col. Frederic A. Henney

The Staff of the 60th Combat Team was also billeted on the *Clymer.*[3]

The plan of attack provided for five simultaneous landings, two at beaches north of the Sebou's mouth and three at beaches south of it. Selection of these particular points for the landings was determined less by hydrographic conditions than by directness of access to separate inland objectives, for the shore offered similar opportunities at many points. About one mile up the river, adjacent to Mehdia, was a sixth beach planned for a later landing, while a seventh was indicated almost nine miles from the river's mouth, directly east of the Port-Lyautey airdrome. The initial assault landings, however, were to be made through the pounding surf characteristic of the Atlantic

[2] See Table 3.

[3] Bledsoe, AGF Obsr's Rpt, 27 Jan 43. AGF 319.1 (For. Obs), Tab 17.

TABLE 3—PERSONNEL AND VEHICLES ASSIGNED TO FORCE "Z" (GOALPOST), AS OF 22 OCTOBER 1942

Unit	Personnel			Vehicles
	Total	Officers	Enlisted	
Total	9,079	525	8,554	881
9th Infantry Division				
1st BLT, 60th Infantry [a]	1,345	61	1,284	118
2d BLT, 60th Infantry [b]	1,268	54	1,214	117
3d BLT, 60th Infantry [c]	1,461	57	1,404	118
Other 60th Infantry Troops [d]	1,318	77	1,241	224
Armored Landing Team				
1st Battalion (reinforced), 66th Armored Regiment [e]	919	40	879	163
Other Force "Z" Personnel				
Detachments, XII Air Support Command	1,936	139	1,797	103
692d-697th Coast Artillery (AA) Batteries	448	30	418	0
Detachment of				
66th Engineer Company (Topographic)	5	0	5	0
1st Armored Signal Battalion	3	0	3	1
9th Signal Company	68	2	66	10
122d Signal Company (Radio Intelligence)	26	1	25	4
163d Signal Company (Photographic)	6	1	5	1
239th Signal Company (Operational)	35	1	34	4
56th Medical Battalion	36	1	35	0
2d Broadcasting Station Operation Detachment	30	11	19	5
Counterintelligence Group	16	1	15	0
Prisoner Interrogation Group	21	6	15	0
Civil Government Personnel	4	4	0	0
Force Headquarters	46	10	36	10
Submarine Markers	30	6	24	0
Harbor Obstruction Experts	40	20	20	0
Naval Personnel	18	3	15	0

[a] Including 1st Platoon, Battery D, 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion.
[b] Including 3d Platoon, Battery D, 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion.
[c] Including 4th Platoon, Battery D, 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion.
[d] Including 1st Battalion, 540th Engineer Regiment.
[e] Including 1st Platoon, Battery B, and 1st Platoon, Battery C, 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion.

Source: Annex A (Troop List) to Memo, TF "A" to ACofS OPD, 22 Oct 42, Order of Battle TF "A" 1942, St. Louis Recds.

shore of Africa. Two battalion landing teams were to use beaches south of the river, a third was to land in two sections on beaches north of the river, and the armored group was to come ashore south of the river at daylight, using whichever beach was then considered most available. The planners hoped that the inside beach (BROWN) on the river's bank near Mehdia would quickly be made accessible to the tank lighters.

The most northerly landing was to be made by about one third of the 3d Battalion Landing Team, 60th Regimental Combat Team (approximately 550 men), on Beach

RED, situated four and a half miles north of the river's mouth. This detachment was expected to hasten to the bluffs north of the Port-Lyautey airfield before daylight. From that point, it was to neutralize the field, reconnoiter to the north and east about five miles, and send a detail to block or gain possession of the bridge over the Sebou near Port-Lyautey. Eventually the detachment would cross the river in rubber boats brought from the beach and participate in a co-ordinated attack on the airfield planned for 1100.

While this operation proceeded, the larger section of the 3d BLT would land at Beach RED 2, less than 1,000 yards north of the river's mouth. In two hours' time, this force was to occupy positions on the northern bank of the Sebou opposite Mehdia from which to furnish supporting artillery and mortar fire for the attack on the Kasba. It was then on order to continue along the northern bank to join the other part of the 3d BLT in the river crossing operation and the attack on the airfield.

The most critical mission was that of the 2d BLT, 60th Regimental Combat Team, whose 1,268 men would land on GREEN Beach, just south of the river's mouth and about one mile from Beach RED 2. Picked units equivalent to two rifle companies would attempt to capture the coastal defenses at Mehdia before daylight, that is, before 0600. If the first effort to seize the batteries by bayonet assault should fail, naval and air bombardment was to be delivered on call by General Truscott after 0615, followed by a second ground assault. The 2d BLT was to establish its beachhead at Mehdia and continue over the ridges to the hill southwest of the airfield for participation in the co-ordinated attack at 1100. With the 2d BLT was to be a joint demolition party of Army engineers and Navy personnel, whose objective would be to find and remove the barrier across the Sebou. The channel was thus to be opened for movement upstream by the destroyer-transport, *Dallas*, carrying a special raider detachment of seventy-five men to a landing at Beach BROWN 2 near the airport, and on the way supporting the advance of the 2d BLT with gunfire on targets of opportunity.

In somewhat the same manner that the 3d BLT utilized Beaches RED and RED 2 north of the river, the 1st BLT was to land simultaneously on two beaches, BLUE and YELLOW, from four to five miles south of the Sebou's mouth. One rifle company was to touch down originally at each beach, and when the defenses and terrain features had been tested the remainder of the BLT would follow to that beach which could be most readily occupied. The mission of the 1st BLT required rapid overland march to block the western exits of Port-Lyautey and to participate at 1100 in the attack on the airdrome. At the same time, detachments were to reconnoiter five miles to the south and southeast and to protect the southwest flank of the sub-task force. Beyond a line which limited this reconnaissance, the supporting air elements would both observe and try to halt French troop movements from Rabat–Salé.

The preferred plan of attack of Mehdia–Port-Lyautey was thus to begin with landings at five points along ten miles of Atlantic shore line. They would begin at an H Hour set at 0400 in order to have two hours of darkness for establishing beachheads and capturing by storm coastal defenses and key positions. Then, while four separate groups advanced overland and a fifth progressed by ship up the Sebou, par-

leys would be sought with the French commander at Port-Lyautey. If the response proved unfriendly, the airfield was to be taken by a co-ordinated attack from three or four sides, from the air, and with the aid of naval gunfire whenever called. Naval aircraft from the *Sangamon* would assist the morning advance and the attack on the airdrome scheduled for 1100 hours. The armored landing team would also land during the day to protect and support the operations, particularly in the area southwest and south of Port-Lyautey. Before nightfall, if all went well, the airport would be in American hands, either by French consent or by capture, and, on D plus 1, it could be used by the *Chenango*'s P–40's and by bombers to be flown in from Gibraltar.

The Enemy Is Alerted

The Northern Attack Group arrived off Mehdia just before midnight, 7–8 November. The lights ashore were shining brightly, and the shore was clearly visible from the transport area, between 15,000 and 16,000 yards out. While the *Texas* and *Savannah* took stations to the north and south, the transports sought designated stations in which to begin disembarkation of the assault troops. They began ship-to-shore operations almost an hour later than the time of arrival, which had been set at 2300, 7 November. The 1st, 2d, and 3d BLT's were on the transports *Henry T. Allen, George Clymer,* and *Susan B. Anthony,* respectively. The 3d Armored Landing Team was on the *John Penn,* with thirty-seven of its light tanks on the *Electra.* Personnel of the XII Air Support Command were on the *Florence Nightingale,* the *Anne Arundel,* and the *Algorab.*

The transports lost formation during the last stage of the approach and never regained it. Since landing craft from five of the ships were first to carry troops from the other three for one or more round trips, much confused searching by boat crews ensued with corresponding delay in forming waves for the actual landings. General Truscott was ferried from transport to transport and agreed to the necessity of postponing H Hour from 0400 to 0430. All the craft which could be dispatched for landings on the revised schedule were then sent in, the others being formed in improvised waves for the follow-up.

Several small French steamers were allowed to pass along the coast through the convoy not long after it came to anchor, and observers on the transport *Henry T. Allen* saw one of these steamers, the *Lorraine,* signal by blinker: "Be warned. Alert on shore for 5 A. M." President Roosevelt's and General Eisenhower's messages had been broadcast from London much earlier, and in the Mediterranean the landings were well advanced before those at Mehdia commenced. Surprise seemed out of the question. Even if the convoy were not visible to watchers ashore, the noise of the winches, the booms, and the motors of landing craft moving among the larger ships should have been audible. It remained to be discovered how (in the absence of fire control radar of later date) darkness might affect the relative strength of attack or defense. Arrangements to sabotage the coastal guns and other defenses had miscarried in consequence of the shift in leadership at Casablanca shortly before the arrival of the expedition.[4] When General Truscott held a conference with his staff on the *Allen* at 0430, it not only seemed certain that surprise had been lost, but also,

[4] Interv with David W. King, 24 Feb 48. See also Ch. IV above.

that the attack would be too late for the bayonet assault in darkness, which he would have preferred. Preparation for a daylight attack by heavy naval bombardment was precluded by Allied policy. The commanding general might have adopted an alternate plan prepared for daylight operations, but the possibilities of success by following the main plan on a delayed schedule seemed equally good. He therefore made the critical decision to persevere along the lines originally laid down.[5]

The defenses at Mehdia were lightly garrisoned. No machine guns and artillery swept the beaches from pillboxes or other emplacements at its upper edge. Naval crews operated two 5-inch guns in protected positions on the tableland above Mehdia village and in the vicinity of the Kasba. Not more than seventy men occupied the fort when the attack started. Two 75-mm. guns were mounted on flat cars on the railroad running beside the river at the base of the bluff on which the Kasba lay. A second battery of four 75's was brought forward after the attack began to a position on the high ground along the road from Mehdia to Port-Lyautey. A battery of four 155-mm. rifles (*Grandes Puissances Filloux*) was emplaced on a hill west of Port-Lyautey and southwest of the airport. The airport was defended by a single antiaircraft battery. The infantry consisted of the 1st Regiment of Moroccan Infantry and the 8th Tabor (battalion) of native Goums. One group of nine 25-mm. guns withdrawn from other infantry regiments and one battalion of engineers completed the defensive force. Reinforcements were sent to occupy the entrenchments and machine gun positions which covered approaches to the coastal guns and the fort and to occupy defensive positions on the ridges east of the lagoon. The guns were manned and ready for action as soon as targets could be discerned. The boom across the river, somewhat upstream from the Kasba, was guarded by machine gunners, riflemen, and artillery. Warning orders brought fighters and twin-engined bombers into the air for attacks at dawn. The Americans were to receive no friendly welcome.

The hostilities soon to begin not only ran counter to the hopes of the Americans, but persisted despite a courageous mission intended to bring them to an early conclusion. Plans had been adjusted while Force GOALPOST was crossing the Atlantic Ocean to include Col. Demas F. Craw in Maj. Pierpont M. Hamilton's mission to go by jeep from an early beach landing near Mehdia to Port-Lyautey to consult the French commander (Col. Charles Petit). The emissaries were to give him a letter similar in purport to the President's broadcast. At first light on 8 November, they went ashore as the fire of coastal batteries and warships and strafing French airplanes began. French troops near the Kasba directed them toward Port-Lyautey, but as they neared the town under a flag of truce, a French machine gunner at a road-fork outpost without warning stopped them with a burst of point-blank fire which killed Colonel Craw. Major Hamilton was then conducted to the headquarters of Colonel Petit, where his reception, though amicable, led to no conclusive reply. He was detained in protective custody, was eventually permitted to telephone Gen. Maurice Mathenet at Meknès, and was encouraged to expect ultimately a favorable response. The pervading atmosphere at the French headquarters in Port-Lyautey was

[5] Bledsoe, AGF Obsr's Rpt, 27 Jan 43. AGF 319.1 (For. Obs), Tab 17.

one of sympathy toward the Allied cause and distaste for the current fighting.[6] What was lacking was an authorization from Colonel Petit's superior to stop fighting. Pending receipt of such authorization, the French at Port-Lyautey continued to fight until they were defeated, but with diminishing zeal.

The 2d BLT Attacks in the Center

In spite of delays and confusion in debarkation, the 2d BLT's first three waves started toward GREEN Beach in time to land before 0600. The way in was marked by various beacon lights, one on a scout boat stationed 700 yards out from the river mouth, and others on the beaches themselves. No resistance was received from shore until the first wave had touched down, possibly as early as 0540. But almost simultaneously with the arrival of this wave at the beach, a searchlight illuminated the scout boat, a red rocket soared from the southern jetty, and coastal guns fired toward the scout boat and toward the destroyers a little farther out. A few salvos from the destroyer *Eberle* darkened the searchlight and temporarily silenced the guns, but before the landings were far advanced two French airplanes passed up and down the beach strafing boats and personnel, and causing some casualties. The first boat teams (containing sections of the heavy weapons company with parts of rifle companies) hastened up the beach to cover, where with later arrivals they organized for the assault. At the same time, the attempt of the special demolition party to cut the river barrier was frustrated by heavy machine gun and rifle fire. The party left without achieving its mission.

Admiral Kelly signaled "Batter Up" for local offensive fire at 0615, and ordered the *Eberle* to reply to the French shelling of the landing craft approaching GREEN Beach. At 0710, orders to "Play Ball," the signal for general naval attack by the whole task force, were received from Admiral Hewitt. The frustrating provisions of the TORCH Plan limited naval bombardment, except when needed by troops ashore, to replies to French fire on offshore targets. In the absence of calls from General Truscott's troops ashore through the shore fire control parties which were assigned to each BLT, naval fire support therefore continued to be withheld.

The assault troops of the 2d BLT, 60th Regimental Combat Team, formed on either side of the coastal road where it bent northeasterly through a band of scrub pine woods between the lagoon and the shore. The highway skirted the marshy northern extremities of the lagoon and the ends of two parallel ridges on either side of that water. The western ridge, covered with thick brush, was fairly steep and reached a height of 75 feet, but the slope just east of the lagoon rose abruptly more than 200 feet to a plateau on which were the principal objectives of the assault. A lighthouse stood on its western shoulder. A thousand yards farther to the northeast was the fortified Kasba, and near the fort, the coastal battery. About half a mile east of the Kasba, on the gradual downward slope, was a small collection of dwellings which the attackers called the "native village." The coastal highway, after passing through Mehdia and running for more than 2,000 yards along the river, rose to join a second road, converging from the high ridge, about 1,000 yards northeast of the native village. It continued

[6] (1) Ltr, Brig Gen Pierpont M. Hamilton (USAF) to author, 31 Jan 50. (2) See also the citations for awards of the Congressional Medal of Honor to Major Hamilton and posthumously to Colonel Craw in *The Medal of Honor of the United States Army*, p. 232.

eastward about three miles farther to Port-Lyautey. The mission of the 2d BLT was first to make its way directly eastward from the beach for approximately one mile to the high ridge and next, turning north, to gain control of the batteries, of other prepared defenses, and of the Kasba itself. Then it was to reorganize and push northeasterly across the Mehdia–Port-Lyautey highway and out to the high ground just southwest of the airdrome.

After reorganizing, the BLT advanced toward the ridge for 600 yards or more without interruption, but upon emerging from the brush it suddenly had to reckon with naval shells that screamed overhead and crumped against the ridge a few hundred yards away. The warships, under orders to reply at once to coastal guns firing to seaward, had opened up without advance notice to troops ashore, although with regard for their possible presence in the target area. The 2d BLT was thus moving beneath counterbattery fire against the guns near the Kasba, which had attempted to hit the transports and supporting ships offshore, rather than naval gunfire requested by the shore fire control party. The troops, inexperienced in the actual effects of such fire and apparently uncertain of its control, melted back into cover in considerable disorder and waited for it to stop.

Maj. John H. Dilley, the 2d Battalion commander, left his naval gunfire liaison officer at the beach and with his artillery officer went toward the forward line. In the vicinity of the lighthouse they could see a few French sailors but no other defenders. Naval bombardment, moreover, ceased. The BLT once more reorganized, again pushed toward the high ridge, and, after a fire fight, gained possession before 0900 of the area near the lighthouse and of trenches leading toward the Kasba. It was now ready to attack the batteries and the fort when naval gunfire again began to fall in the same area, this time causing a hasty retreat. A green flare, the signal to cease fire, was sent up, but although the flare was seen by the naval gunfire liaison officer at the beach and reported by radio to the fire support ship, the USS *Roe,* respite was brief. Other naval vessels did not receive the order and more shells fell, thwarting the attack for the second time. Although the rate of exchange between the coastal guns and the warships approximated two French shells for thirty American, the latter did not effect complete neutralization of the batteries. Furthermore, the naval gunfire held up the infantry attack at a time when Kasba's defenders were fewest, and thus inadvertently helped prolong the whole operation. Accordingly, after the attack was thus suspended, Colonel de Rohan, Commanding Officer, 60th Regimental Combat Team, appeared at the lighthouse and gave orders for its resumption. These orders were misunderstood by Major Dilley as requiring that his battalion bypass the Kasba and push on to the northeast. In spite of much straggling and confusion, of poor contact with the rear echelon of the battalion command post, and in spite of the fact that one company had to be left in trenches near the Kasba, the remainder of the 2d BLT continued eastward into the native village. There, shortly after 1230, the badly shaken unit came under counterattack. Troops from Port-Lyautey had moved up to stop them. A small force of French infantry approached the village from the east and from the highway north of it, supported by 75's firing from near the road. Although the shore fire control party had a telephone line to the front by that time, and had succeeded in bringing naval gunfire and

air bombardment on the French artillery, they did not stop the French from receiving reinforcements of several more truckloads of the 1st Regiment of Moroccan Infantry, in addition to two towed guns, at about 1400, and three old-style French tanks at 1530. The men of the 2d BLT, already much reduced by casualties and considerable straggling, and lacking artillery support until late in the afternoon, fell back in groups.[7] The French took a substantial number of prisoners from a detachment covering the withdrawal. Even after two of the tanks were knocked out by grenades and the third withdrew, the BLT troops kept pulling back piecemeal, taking up positions along the ridge near the lighthouse, particularly in the cover south of it.[8] There they were at nightfall. The French counteroffensive threatened to continue during the night, and perhaps in greater strength. The situation near Mehdia was precarious.

The 1st BLT Attacks on the South Wing

Navigational errors brought most of the 1st Battalion Landing Team, 60th Regimental Combat Team (Maj. Percy DeW. McCarley, Jr.), to shore from the *Henry T. Allen* about 2,800 yards north of BLUE Beach instead of on BLUE and YELLOW Beaches, and its second wave landed ahead of the first. Fortunately, the BLT was able to reorganize without enemy interference. After touching down at 0535, its units assembled, made a three-mile detour around the southern end of the lagoon, and sent detachments to establish roadblocks at each of the road junctions for six miles to the south. About five hours after the landings began, it started northeastward along the high ground. Battery A, 60th Field Artillery, set up its 75-mm. pack howitzers in a valley southeast of the lagoon and prepared to support the advance.

Three detachments of Company A defended the roadblocks against enemy probing attacks, at first using machine guns, mortars, and bazookas, and later in the day, 37-mm. antitank guns from the Headquarters Company and the Regimental Antitank Company.

The main body of McCarley's BLT, leaving Company A in reserve and moving slowly toward Port-Lyautey, first met organized resistance about noon on the high ground almost due east of its landing place. There, well-concealed French machine guns pinned the column down on a ridge until late in the afternoon. Shelling by Battery A, 60th Field Artillery Battalion, finally broke up the French resistance just before nightfall. While the BLT was preparing to continue the advance next morning, it was visited by General Truscott, who ordered Major McCarley to establish contact at once with Major Dilley's BLT to the north and, at first light, to resume the attack toward the airfield. Responsibility for protecting the southern flank of the beachhead was transferred to Lt. Col. Harry H. Semmes, CO, 3d Armored Landing Team of the 66th Armored Regiment.

[7] Battery B, 60th Field Artillery, landed about 0700, hauled its guns across the beach to cover while under shellfire, and eventually got into a position described as "about 1000 yards inland" to fire on coastal defense guns and defensive works outside the Kasba rather than against the counterattacking enemy. 1st Bn 60th FA AAR, 8–11 Nov 42.

[8] The lighthouse was held by 2d Lt. S. W. Sprindis, 60th Infantry antitank officer, by firing a bazooka from different positions along a wall to give the attacking force the impression of an entire battery of 75's. For this exploit General Patton gave him a battlefield promotion. Patton Diary, 19 Nov 42.

French motorcycle, armored car, and tank units of increasing strength—the advance elements of a substantial column from Rabat—tested the outposts on the southern flank on D Day and drove them back by evening. These blocking actions, however, including use of a bazooka which was mistaken by the enemy for heavy artillery, had delayed the northward march of the main French force long enough to permit the Americans to assemble a very small armored detachment during the night with which to meet the French in that area on D plus 1.

The 3d BLT's Attack on the North Wing

The 3d Battalion Landing Team, 60th Infantry (under command of Lt. Col. John J. Toffey, Jr.), experienced perhaps the greatest difficulties of any unit off Mehdia in getting ashore on D Day. Its transport, the *Susan B. Anthony,* first had to transfer a raider detachment to the *Dallas* for the move up the Sebou river. Next, the landing craft had to be organized into waves near the control ship, *Osprey,* which was to guide them to Beaches RED and RED 2. Since none of the vessels was in its prearranged position, operations in the darkness became fumbling and uncertain. Debarkation from the transport was also slowed by other difficulties, and the whole process fell far behind schedule. It was at least 0500 before the first three assault waves for each beach were in formation near the *Osprey.* The flotilla then went north for a few miles along the coast and at approximately 0600 turned right and headed eastward to the mist-covered shore. Since the boats had been brought far north of the Sebou and daylight had already arrived, Colonel Toffey, on his own responsibility, decided to follow the alternate plan for a consolidated landing by his entire unit on RED Beach only. As the turn to the beach was in progress, two French planes swept low over the boats, strafing and bombing, and causing the loss of two landing craft but without casualties among their occupants.

The first landings occurred about 0630, along a one-mile front well to the northeast of RED Beach. No fire was received from the desolate shore. The boat teams hurried up the sandy slopes seeking cover from attack by more strafing planes. Machine gun squads of the 692d Coast Artillery (AA) and of Company M, 60th Infantry, among units in the first waves, swiftly set up their weapons and brought down two of the planes in offshore crashes. Four companies (I, K, M, and Headquarters Company) with their medical detachments, rather than stopping to reorganize, continued as boat teams until they had struggled up the steep escarpment east of the sand dunes to high ground, about 165 feet above the sea. Two hours after the first landings, they had completed the climb, carrying their equipment, and were ready to advance to the bluffs north of the airdrome.

Checking maps, the 3d BLT discovered that it had not been brought to RED Beach, but instead to a point five miles farther north. What lay ahead therefore was an arduous cross-country march of approximately five miles with the necessity of hand-carrying everything over ridges and through scrub growth. The BLT met no resistance and was in position (but without supporting artillery) on Hill 58 by noon. The naval gunfire control party set up radios on the bluff above the beach and on Hill 74, about 1,000 yards north-northeast of Hill 58, and strung telephone wire across the intervening area. Thus it could soon adjust fire for the *Savannah* on a French 155-mm. gun battery

observed to be in action southwest of the airfield. Western Morocco's largest ammunition dump, a collection of detached beehive structures on the eastern slope of the same ridge, was also bombarded by the main 14-inch battery of the *Texas* at a range of 12,000 yards. Reconnaissance parties found no enemy troops or installations to the northeast but ascertained that the Port-Lyautey bridge over the Sebou was mined and strongly defended. At the beach all available personnel labored to open exits through the dunes and up the escarpment, while along the route to Hill 58 others constructed a road. By 2230, the guns of Battery C, 60th Field Artillery Battalion, had been dragged to emplacements on Hill 74. Later, the rubber boats were sent forward from the beach in half-tracks. The first day's operations left Colonel Toffey's BLT with much to do before it could attack the airfield.

Summary of D Day

The attack at Mehdia–Port-Lyautey departed from the basic plan at the outset and never returned to it. In the hope of adhering to the original arrangements, the landing schedule was, as already indicated, delayed a half hour, but this proved insufficient. The delay was actually protracted for almost one and a half hours. Next, the arrangement for simultaneous landings at five coastal points was modified drastically. The 3d BLT, seeing that its operations ashore were beginning in daylight, shifted to the alternate plan; its two separate landings were consolidated into one for RED Beach, well north of the Sebou river's mouth. The larger section of the 3d BLT was to have supported the 2d BLT's advance against Mehdia and the Kasba by parallel movement on the opposite side of the river but actually did not do so. And further to complicate the situation, the 3d BLT was put ashore at a point some five miles north of RED Beach, greatly lengthening the amount of rough terrain over which it had to struggle to reach the bluffs north of the airdrome.

Major McCarley's 1st BLT was brought to shore 2,800 yards north of BLUE Beach instead of at BLUE and YELLOW Beaches. The resulting situation not only interfered with the landings of Major Dilley's 2d BLT on GREEN Beach, but also necessitated a slow detour around the southern end of the coastal lagoon before the 1st BLT could reach the high ground east of it and start toward the airdrome. The 2d BLT began its landings only twenty minutes before dawn, and its inland advance by daylight met with stronger resistance than its schedule allowed for. The 75-mm. battery attached to each BLT had been of but little use, either because of delays in emplacement and in establishing fire control, or because of doubts as to the location of forward troops. The naval gunfire which had served well on the southern flank and farther inland toward Port-Lyautey had not been well co-ordinated in the zone of attack near the coastal guns and the Kasba, although elsewhere it had been of the greatest value.

The delay and confusion attributable to departures from the plan were increased by French air strafing of the beaches at dawn, French bombardment of the transport area, and defective communications between ship and shore after 0700, when the transports withdrew to a point fifteen miles out to sea. At 1100 on D Day, instead of being able to launch a co-ordinated attack on the Port-Lyautey airdrome, the main elements of Sub-Task Force GOALPOST were still striving to gain firm footholds and were under imperfect control. The French had not been

dislodged from the vitally important Kasba. The barrier to navigation of the river remained in place. The French still controlled the south bank of the river and the nose of the ridge southwest of the airport. Enemy reinforcements from Port-Lyautey had strengthened the resistance to Dilley's BLT in the Kasba area and had held McCarley's BLT well south of positions which it was to have occupied before 1100. The 3d BLT was most nearly in position, for its leading elements were digging in on the bluffs and ridges north of the airfield, waiting for artillery and rubber boats to arrive from the distant landing point, while other detachments were reconnoitering to the northeast and east.

The situation of General Truscott's whole force at nightfall, 8 November, was insecure and even precarious. He himself had come ashore in the early afternoon after a morning during which, because of inadequate communications, he could gain little exact information and could exercise insufficient control. There he found his battalion and company commanders in similar difficulties with their subordinate units. In a half-track carrying a radio,[9] he ranged over the beachhead attempting to meet the most immediate problems and to improve co-ordination. As the afternoon gave way to darkness, the unsatisfactory conditions at the beaches were deteriorating still further. Far fewer heavy weapons had been landed than were required for defense against prospective enemy action. The tank lighters had been too few, and when failure to capture the coastal guns forced the transports to move out of range of possible shelling, the round trip between ship and shore had been lengthened to more than thirty miles. The rare calm prevailing during most of the day disappeared with winds which sprang up at sunset. By night, the surf was rising and before daylight wave crests reached fifteen feet in height. Boats had more and more difficulty in landing and retracting. Stranded crews and misplaced troops roved along the beaches, contributing to the serious confusion. Inland, the enemy threatened to make strong counterattacks, either during the night or at daylight.

General Truscott had by then committed all of his slender reserve. Company L (less detachments), 60th Infantry, was sent forward late in the afternoon to reinforce Major Dilley's 2d BLT. During the night, all available men were taken from the shore party at Beach GREEN, organized into provisional units, and put in defense of the ridge line east of the beach. Colonel Semmes's seven light tanks were held in outpost positions along the beach until well after midnight, when they left to reach positions on the south wing of the beachhead before dawn. Since naval gunfire from the *Savannah,* under its own air spotting, had proved effective on D Day, it was again requested, this time for support of the tanks at first light. The French column from Rabat which had driven the outposts of Company A (reinforced), 60th Infantry, back toward the beachhead during the afternoon was expected to attack in force at dawn.[10] A Provisional Assault Group consisting of three rifle and two heavy weapons platoons was organized from shore party personnel,

[9] SCR-193.

[10] The units of this column were later identified as the staff, scout car troop, and two squadrons of light Renault tanks, of the 1st Regiment, African Chasseurs, some motorcycle troops of the Moroccan Guard, and truck-borne infantry believed to be the 2d and 3d Battalions, 7th Moroccan Tirailleurs. The tanks had 37-mm. guns, light armor, and two-man crews.

placed under the command of Capt. A. O. Chittenden, Coast Artillery Corps, and sent to reinforce the 1st BLT east of the lagoon.

The Second Day's Operations

During the night, while General Mathenet carried out the orders from General Lascroux's headquarters to shift from Meknès to Port-Lyautey as part of a revised scheme of French defensive operations, more reinforcements went toward Port-Lyautey from Fès and Meknès, though heavily attacked by planes after daylight.[11] Some reached the Kasba area, where a dawn counterattack in strength threatened to drive Major Dilley's force back to the beach itself. But the impending counterattack on the southern flank by an armored French column and two battalions of infantry was General Truscott's principal concern. If the French armor broke through the small defending force, it could disrupt the entire attack. The 1st BLT, 60th Regimental Combat Team, could be struck in the rear and scattered, and BLUE Beach might then be wrested from its occupants.

The swell and surf were running too high to unload additional tanks or heavy weapons during the night. General Truscott, obliged to use available armor to repel the counterattack, had to deny to Major McCarley's BLT the armored support with which it might have succeeded in getting to the airfield that day. He sent Colonel Semmes with his seven light tanks to take up positions blocking the Rabat–Port-Lyautey highway before dawn. The tanks had to be controlled without radio, for this equipment had been put out of order by the long period of disuse while en route by sea. Furthermore, the tankmen had had no opportunity to reset the sights on their 37-mm. guns before contact with the French. Semmes's tanks took positions astride the highway southeast of the lagoon as the first gray light of a cold morning appeared. What followed was the first tank engagement in Morocco.[12]

As Colonel Semmes's light tanks moved toward the main highway shortly after 0600, they first drove off with heavy casualties a company of French infantry in positions in the woods and near a farm across the road. About half an hour later, some fourteen to eighteen Renault tanks (armed with 37-mm. guns) and approximately two battalions of infantry came into view, approaching along the road from Rabat. The American tanks thereupon withdrew behind a slight rise which offered some protection and opened fire on the column. Frontal armor on Semmes's seven tanks was too heavy for the answering French fire to pierce. Though most of the American firing was also rendered ineffective by the unadjusted sights of the tanks' major weapons, it destroyed four French tanks, inflicted severe losses among the French infantry, and stopped the thrust into Force GOALPOST's southern flank. While the French were held back, gunfire from the *Savannah* was directed by her spotting planes on the enemy's tank assembly area in a little woods near the highway and on other French targets. This accurate fire forced the French to break off the attack and to withdraw temporarily.

[11] The reinforcements were: Staff, Regimental Company, and 3d Battalion, Foreign Legion; Staff and 1st Battalion, 7th Regiment of Moroccan Tirailleurs; 6th Motorcycle Troop, Moroccan Guard; 2d Battalion, 64th Regiment of African Artillery (2 batteries).

[12] (1) Interv, 9 Mar 50, with Brig Gen Harry H. Semmes (O.R.C.), who in 1949 had revisited the scene of this fight. (2) Lt. Gen. L. K. Truscott, Jr. (USA, Ret.), *Command Missions* (New York, 1954), 114–16.

General Truscott attached ten or more light tanks of Company C, 70th Tank Battalion, and one section of antitank guns from the 60th Regimental Cannon Company to Colonel Semmes's force in time to help repulse a second French attack at about 0900. Throughout the day, the battle continued on a diminishing scale under a brilliant sky. By the latter part of the afternoon, the threat to the southern flank of the beachhead had so moderated that Company C, 70th Tank Battalion, was released to Major McCarley's force in the hope that he could thereby push through to the airfield before nightfall. During the night, nine more tanks and the reconnaissance platoon came ashore in time to reinforce the 3d Armored Landing Team for the third day's operations.[13]

The tank engagement on the southern flank had just begun on 9 November when the 1st BLT, 60th Regimental Combat Team, reinforced by Captain Chittenden's Provisional Assault Group and supported by Battery A, 60th Field Artillery Battalion, resumed its advance toward the airfield, some seven miles away. The axis of advance ran diagonally over a series of partly wooded ridges. The first resistance came about 1030 in the form of light and ineffective fire from an unexpected direction—the areas of the lighthouse and the Kasba which had supposedly passed under control of the 2d BLT, 60th Regimental Combat Team. No other French opposition seriously impeded the progress of Major McCarley's force until it arrived at the crest of Mhignat Touama (52) about 1500. By that time, the French had deployed along the highway to the northeast and on a wooded height to the east, and using mortar and heavy machine gun fire soon pinned down the leading American elements. While supporting American artillery, naval gunfire, and tanks were being brought into action, the French, including some cavalry, organized on the east flank for a counterattack. The 105-mm. howitzers of Battery A, 60th Field Artillery Battalion, stopped the flanking fire from the east. This feat, together with the timely arrival of ten light tanks of Company C, 70th Tank Battalion, forestalled the threatened counterattack. Highly effective naval gunfire on the highway area and bombing by seaplane of French machine gun positions ahead of the 1st BLT appeared to be clearing the way for a tank-infantry advance before dark. The BLT therefore organized to resume its push toward the airfield as soon as the naval gunfire should be lifted.

At that juncture, two accidents spoiled the prospects. The BLT's front was not marked by identification panels during this pause, and a Navy plane dropped two bombs among the troops. Artillery fire from an unidentified source also fell in the area. The disorganization which ensued delayed the preparations until darkness was too near to warrant starting prolonged tank-infantry operations. The tankers prepared to lie up until morning while the infantry attacked alone.

Farther north, Major Dilley's 2d BLT, stopped late on D Day by a French counterattack east of the lagoon, was expected to reorganize during the night and to resume the advance against the Kasba. Company L (less detachments), 60th Infantry, which had reinforced the unit late on D Day, remained for the second day's operation. Morning arrived before all the scrambled units had been sorted out, and with morning the French attacked again. They had

[13] (1) Memo, Lt Col Charles F. Smith for ACofS OPD, 15 Dec 42, sub: Obsn on WTF. AGF 319.1 DRB AGO. (2) AAR, 3d Armd Landing Team, 8–11 Nov 42.

substantially reinforced the Kasba area during the night. Some French troops pushed along the shelf on the southern side of the river as far as Mehdia at the northern end of the beach, overwhelming American outposts on the ridge. Fire from American positions near the lighthouse drove the French from Mehdia temporarily, but they brought up some 75-mm. guns and mortars, in turn forcing the Americans to abandon the lighthouse area, after holding it for more than twenty-four hours. Artillery fire from the 155-mm. battery southwest of the airport pinned them down for the first part of that afternoon (9 November). The rest of the day passed in a sort of deadlock, with the 2d BLT unable to arrange a successful coordinated attack despite the availability of artillery, naval gunfire, and air support. Thus the second day ended with the Kasba still in French possession.[14]

North of the airfield on the morning of 9 November, the 105-mm. howitzers of Battery C, 60th Field Artillery, were in position. They caused at least a temporary evacuation of the airdrome barracks and engaged in a counterbattery duel with French guns on the hills southwest of the field. In the early afternoon, rubber boats and assault guns arrived from RED Beach. Orders were issued for two related night operations.

Companies K and M, 60th Infantry, began an approach march at 1630 down the tongue of river flatlands toward the western end of the Port-Lyautey bridge, some three miles away. After dark, Company I crossed the river from the northern bank in the rubber boats, intending to create at least a diversion on the airfield which might aid the force attempting to seize the bridge. On signal, one heavy concentration of artillery was to be fired into the area near the bridge. Then the structure was to be rushed with a sudden assault. Company I's venture on the airfield was to be assisted by neutralizing salvos from the *Kearny* on enemy troops in the hills southwest of the airfield.

The Night Attacks, 9–10 November

The two night operations by Colonel Toffey's BLT were only partly successful. Company I crossed the river in the rubber boats but lost its bearings near the airfield and eventually dug in on the southern river bank near the point of crossing, where it awaited daylight. Companies K and M drove the French defenders from the western end of the Port-Lyautey bridge but were in turn repulsed by artillery fire. A machine gun platoon was left in position to block enemy use of the bridge while the rest of the detachment returned, with its casualties, to Hill 58.

These night operations in the vicinity of the airdrome had their counterpart in the attempts of Major McCarley's BLT to move in from the southwest. Companies B, C, and D selected a route of approach before dark and started at 2300 from the Mhignat Touama in column of companies. The sky was deeply overcast and visibility was poor. The column, instead of continuing according to plan past Port-Lyautey, between a low white prison structure on the right and the high ground on the left, and on an axis approximately paralleling an old railroad embankment, swung unintentionally to the east toward Port-Lyautey. At 0100, the leading elements ran into a machine gun outpost. The force split into three parts, with further splintering ensuing as the men sought to evade the hostile fire.

[14] 2d Bn, 60th Inf, AAR, 8–11 Nov 42.

The major part of the 1st BLT, 60th Regimental Combat Team, resumed its progress toward the airport until, at 0430, the men arrived at a blacked-out building which they believed to be the barracks. The structure was stealthily surrounded. Machine guns were placed to control all exit roads and paths. The occupants were then called upon to surrender. They surrendered at once, about seventy-five in all, after setting down their cups and wine glasses, for the building proved to be not a barracks but a café. Patrols took about 100 more prisoners in the vicinity.

The French saw no reason to pursue energetically a battle which they expected soon to terminate. When Colonel Petit, with a staff officer of the 1st Regiment of Moroccan Tirailleurs, was capured a little later, he ordered that whole unit to cease firing. The two officers were, at their own suggestion, paroled in the custody of Major Hamilton but at their own headquarters in Port-Lyautey. Since he was being detained there, they returned to him and thus created a novel situation not quite covered by the rules of war.[15] As the morning advanced, the 7th Regiment of Moroccan Tirailleurs was also ordered to quit. The major portion of the 1st BLT then organized positions controlling the highways leading toward Mehdia and Rabat and waited for the cessation of some naval gunfire which temporarily barred their further progress to the airfield.

Major McCarley and part of Company B had moved from the point of dispersion through the darkness and rain, by error, all the way to the south edge of Port-Lyautey. At daylight they found the French troops there quite willing to avoid hostilities, but as they went to rejoin the rest of their unit they were stopped and captured by a more belligerent Foreign Legion infantry battalion.

The third part of the 1st BLT that had been separated during the night from the original column, consisting of a company commander and fifty-five enlisted men, returned from the French outpost to the original line of departure for the night's march. At daylight, these men started again toward the airport, supported by tanks of Company C, 70th Tank Battalion. The advance persisted in spite of opposition, the tanks accounting for four French antitank guns and twenty-eight machine guns, and the whole force reaching the western edge of the airdrome at 1045 or a little later.

Pressure to gain the airfield was extremely urgent. At the end of operations on D plus 2, not only was it still in French hands but the barrier boom across the Sebou had not even been removed. The night of 9–10 November was stormy and starless and the sea rough. Nevertheless, about 2130 a joint demolition party set out to cut the barrier. The boat made its way from the transport *Clymer* to the river, and failing to find Colonel Henney, Commanding Officer, 15th Engineers (C), at an expected rendezvous, the group proceeded with its task under Lt. M. K. Starkweather (USNR). The cable was cut, and one man, lowered into the water, confirmed that nothing else remained. The smaller signal wire then broke and the boom parted. As guards ashore opened heavy fire, the boat hurried away in the darkness with eight minor casualties. The men returned to the *Clymer* at 0430. They believed that they had opened the way for the raider detachment on the *Dallas*, although an extremely exacting bit of navigation remained if the passage to the airdrome was to be successful.

[15] Ltr, Gen Hamilton to author, 31 Jan 50.

Closing on the Airdrome, 10 November

Daylight on 10 November, the third day of the attack, found the scattered 1st BLT with one part about 3,000 yards south of the airport, holding over 200 prisoners and determined to press on, and another part determined to advance over the high ground southwest of the airport with a group of light tanks. It found the 2d BLT under urgent orders to take the Kasba, and strengthened by two self-propelled 105-mm. assault guns. The 3d BLT at daybreak had put one rifle company in position to attack the airport from the north, supported by artillery. At the mouth of the river, the *Dallas* was about to attempt to force its way through the newly breached barrier and past the Kasba in order to carry the raider detachment to the airfield. Colonel Semmes's armored landing team, with fifteen or sixteen light tanks and supporting guns and infantry, stood firmly across the path of whatever strength might be sent from Rabat to reinforce the Port-Lyautey defenders. A request to Western Task Force for reinforcements had been refused; after the 2d Battalion, 20th Combat Engineers, had been committed at Fedala on D Day, there were no more to send.[16] Offshore, the *Texas*, the *Savannah*, the *Eberle*, *Roe*, and *Kearny* cruised slowly into positions from which to furnish fire support, and, well out of sight of land, the *Sangamon's* planes awaited an adequate wind for take-offs from the slow, converted tanker. Early air missions had to be refused, but by 0900 planes could be dispatched on reconnaissance as far as Meknès and Rabat, while others rose to circle on air alert, ready to respond when bombing missions were called for.

[16] Patton Diary, 10 Nov 42.

The destroyer-transport *Dallas*, carrying the raider detachment, at 0530 began working her way into the mouth of the Sebou against an ebb tide in very rough water, guided by a local river pilot whom the Office of Strategic Services had spirited out of Morocco with just such a mission as this in prospect. The vessel reached the boom in the gray light of dawn only to discover that the buoys were anchored, with the result that the boom had not swung all the way open and would have to be rammed. As the muddy bottom sucked at her hull, and shells from the Kasba began to smack the water near her, the ship steamed up to the boom, knifed through it, and continued up the river. She had survived the worst danger at the outset, but shells still narrowly missed her as long as she was visible from a tall building in Port-Lyautey.[17] Heavy machine gun fire which raked her decks from the hills near the airfield had to be stopped by her own counterfire, while the *Kearny* neutralized one 75-mm. battery by prearranged fire. The persistent immunity of the ship and her passengers was little short of miraculous.

At the sharp turn in the river, where the men of Company I had been dug in for several hours, they could hear the sounds of gunfire along the river to the west and, at 0720, could see the masts of the *Dallas* above the low river bank. A few minutes later, the ship was picking its way past the scuttled French vessel, *St. Amiel*, and starting southward. Two American seaplanes covered these last movements. At 0737, the *Dallas* stopped, stranded in shallow water but near the seaplane base on the eastern border of the airdrome. Artillery fire from about 4,000 yards to the east, beyond the

[17] Interv, 19 Jun 51, with Capt R. J. Brodie (USN), her commanding officer at the time of this exploit.









PATH OF THE RAIDER DETACHMENT ABOARD THE *DALLAS*. *Jetties and mouth of the Sebou, top. The Kasba as seen from the deck of the* Dallas, *middle left; right, the scuttled French freighter in the river. Bottom,* Dallas *off Port-Lyautey airdrome.*

bridge, suddenly opened up, only to be silenced with extraordinary speed and efficiency by the vessel's 3-inch guns and by bombing from a seaplane. The raider detachment quickly debarked in rubber boats. Attacking toward the west while I Company moved in from the north, the Americans cleared the enemy from the field and held possession by 0800. Soon the aircraft carrier *Chenango* was preparing to catapult its P–40's for flight to the airfield.

Colonel Toffey, with the forward observer of Battery C, 60th Field Artillery, and a party from Company I, reconnoitered the Port-Lyautey bridge. Observing enemy batteries along the Rabat–Tangier highway northeast of Port-Lyautey, they called fire from Battery C and from the *Texas, Eberle,* and *Kearny* on the targets. Dive bombers also participated in silencing these guns before they could deliver interdictory fire on the airdrome, once the airfield was in American use. By noon, although the French blew out three spans of the bridge, patrols with tanks had brought the city of Port-Lyautey and the high ground southwest of the airport under American control. The P–40's from the *Chenango* began landing on the shell-pocked field and its slippery runways about 1030.

Taking the Kasba

On 10 November, shortly before the attack on the airdrome, the 2d BLT, reinforced by self-propelled assault guns, moved out at first light from a line of departure south of the lighthouse against positions organized by the French from its vicinity to that of the Kasba. The attack seemed to gather strength as it proceeded, and by 0930 had cleared all resistance from entrenchments and machine gun nests outside the walls of the Kasba. Colonel de Rohan himself took charge of the assaults against the gates of the fort. Two 105's fired at point blank range, but without success. A provisional assault company of 125 engineer troops, consisting of detachments from three companies of the 540th Engineers (Combat), from the 15th Engineers (Combat), and from the 871st Aviation Engineers, operating under Capt. Verle McBride, a company commander of the 540th Engineers (Combat), reinforced the 2d BLT in these attempts.[18] Twice during the final stage of approach, attacks were thwarted by intense machine gun and rifle fire from within the fort. At this juncture, General Truscott transmitted a call by de Rohan to the carrier-based naval bombers to deliver a supporting strike. Lt. D. C. Dressendorfer (USN), the naval air liaison officer, by radio guided a flight of dive bombers to the Kasba, where smoke shells marked the particular target. Within four minutes of the request, the flight began to peel off one at a time to drop bombs in the vicinity of the gates. The assaulting troops waited between 100 and 200 yards from the target, recovered from the shock before the French, and rushed the fort while the smoke and dust were still thick. Surrender by about 250 troops followed quickly. The back of French defense at Mehdia–Port-Lyautey was clearly broken, for the coastal guns near the Kasba had been silenced earlier by bombardments from artillery, by naval gunfire, and by naval air; the 155-mm. battery and other French artillery near the airport had already been neutralized by naval gunfire. What remained was to secure the area against counterattacks, sniping, and sabo-

[18] WTF Final Rpt, Operations TORCH, Annex 8, p. 2.



AIRCRAFT CARRIER *CHENANGO with P–40 pursuit planes on deck, November 1942.*

tage and thus to guarantee the effective use of the airfield and seaplane base.

After the surrender of the Kasba, Major Dilley reorganized his BLT for the last phase of its advance to the nose of the ridge, looming above the airfield. On General Truscott's orders, an improvised reserve force of headquarters and shore party troops was brought up from GREEN Beach to protect the BLT's south flank. A French force had been observed there in the woods about two miles southeast of the fort, presumably after infiltrating behind McCarley's scattered command. On an 800-yard front, with a self-propelled 105-mm. gun on the left wing and a single tank behind Company F on the right, the 2d BLT moved through the native village, which it had held temporarily on D Day, and continued toward the main highway leading to Port-Lyautey. The artillery and naval gunfire liaison parties were in close touch with the forward situation and able to respond quickly to called fire. By 1430 a hill about 1,500 yards northeast of Mhignat Touama was wrested from French defenders by employing both the 105-mm. assault gun and the tank. The BLT, under renewed orders, completed the last mile of the advance to the nose. About 150 prisoners were taken during the afternoon. All resistance near the airport had ended by 1730.

The Final Phase

While the airfield was being cleared on 10 November, French reinforcements approached Port-Lyautey over the highway in a truck column from the direction of Meknès. Deep supporting naval fire against it was delivered on call by the main battery of the *Texas*. Between 0842 and 1131, 214 rounds of 14-inch high explosive shells struck intermittently at a range of 17,000 yards. The column halted, then reversed, and eventually dispersed in complete disorganization, its damaged trucks left beside the highway, which was cratered by at least five direct hits.

On the southern flank, near the coast French armored forces from the direction of Rabat made several attempts to counterat-

tack successfully through the area of the preceding day's failure, each thrust being stopped by American armor and then driven back with losses by naval gunfire and air bombing.

Unloading the transports had been badly hampered by the delay in obtaining access to the lower Sebou river and BROWN Beach. When the surf on GREEN and BLUE Beaches mounted during D plus 1, landing craft either foundered and broke apart at the beach or, once safely in, found retraction impossible. The urgent need for medical supplies, water, and ammunition, and for tanks, could not be met in spite of several attempts. The toll in damaged boats mounted sharply until all ship-to-shore movement was suspended. Salvage efforts proved fruitless until midday of 10 November. When unloading resumed, only a very small number of craft were found to be serviceable.

As soon on 10 November as the Kasba had been captured and BROWN Beach inside the jetties became accessible, the transports moved near the mouth of the river. Almost at once they were ordered back out to sea to escape a submarine which the *Roe* had detected at 1045. Some three hours later the ships returned to anchorage, and unloading then proceeded faster than the shore parties could handle it. Only 1,500 to 2,000 yards offshore, they were protected by a tight antisubmarine screen as well as by daylight air antisubmarine patrols. One crew of a landing craft, mechanized (LCM), from the *Florence Nightingale* made over fifty-one round trips.

The resulting congestion at BROWN Beach was relieved to some extent by sending cargoes up the river as far as the airport or even to Port-Lyautey. The *Osprey* and *Raven* were diverted from use as mine sweepers to serve as freight lighters. Captured French vessels were also pressed into service. The *Contessa,* which had been escorted to Mehdia by the destroyer USS *Cowie* after it overtook the Southern Attack Force on 7 November, started up the Sebou river at 1620 on 10 November. She ran aground soon after passing the Kasba and had to wait until high tide early next morning for enough depth to complete the passage. The seaplane tender Barnegat made the trip up the river on 11 November with the supply and maintenance requirements of the Navy's Patrol Squadron 73. The eleven long-range reconnaissance aircraft of this unit began arriving from the United Kingdom two days later.

French resistance in Mehdia and Port-Lyautey had dwindled by evening of 10 November to sniping, a practice which the French later attributed to the theft of firearms by Arabs from unguarded American stocks. Dislocated groups and individual soldiers filtered back through Port-Lyautey all day. At 2230, 10 November, General Mathenet telephoned to the Army headquarters there and, in conversation with Major Hamilton, expressed the wish to meet General Truscott to discuss the cessation of hostilities. With Col. Leon LeBeau, deputy commander, Port-Lyautey, and a French bugler repeatedly blowing the cease-fire call, Major Hamilton went in his jeep to a point on the airfield where troops and tanks of Company C, 70th Tank Battalion, had assembled. Over the radio in a tank on the airfield, he was able to talk with Colonel Semmes at the southern edge of the beachhead. The latter took his tank along the beach to General Truscott's command post, and the two officers then found a place at which radio contact with Hamilton could

be renewed.[19] While thus arranging for a meeting near the gates of the Kasba at 0800, Major Hamilton also communicated through Navy channels. A blinker on the airfield signaled to the *Dallas,* anchored off the airport: (Paraphrase)

General Mathenet has received instructions approved by Marshal Pétain to terminate resistance at once. He requests an interview with you as soon as possible at the time and place which you designate.

From the *Dallas* this message was conveyed via Admiral Kelly.[20] The prolonged and complicated battle of Mehdia–Port-Lyautey thus came to an end at 0400, 11 November 1942.

The formal meeting at the Kasba at 0800 was a brightly colored pageant of varied French and colonial uniforms, Arab costumes, and flags. General Mathenet agreed that the French troops in his sector should remain in barracks with the Americans in possession of what they had won, while ultimate terms were reached at higher levels.

General Mathenet's readiness to yield the Salé airport without further delay made unnecessary a planned march along the coastal road to Rabat–Salé to seize the airport there, the force to be aided by the fire support of the *Texas* and the *Savannah* and some of the destroyers. Late that night Admiral Hewitt signaled to the Northern Attack Force that hostilities had ceased in French Morocco. "Be especially vigilant against Axis submarines," he warned.

Salvage of the damaged landing craft and scuttled French vessels followed, as did the unloading of the transports, inspection of the French defenses, and analysis of the performance of American weapons. On 14 November the naval elements prepared to leave early next day, either for Casablanca or Safi,[21] and thence for Hampton Roads. Battle damage to the airfield was repaired and all possible steps taken to produce a state of readiness for advance to the northeast to establish contact with General Fredendall's Center Task Force.

At a cost of seventy-nine killed the capture of Port-Lyautey by Force GOALPOST had won for the Allies a vital airdrome, a seaplane base from which to engage in the critical battle of the Atlantic against Axis submarines, and a focal point of transportation routes through northeastern Morocco to Algeria and Tunisia.

[19] Intervs with Gen Hamilton, 30 Nov 49, and Gen Semmes, 9 Mar 50; Ltr, Hamilton to author, 31 Jan 50.

[20] Emissaries came through the lines from Rabat after the arrangement was concluded.

[21] The *Anthony* and the *Algorab,* escorted by the *Kearny* and the *Parker,* went to Safi first.

CHAPTER IX

The End of Hostilities in Morocco

Armistice

Late on the afternoon of 10 November General Noguès was indirectly apprised at Fès that Admiral Darlan had issued orders in the name of Marshal Pétain to stop the useless fighting. While awaiting confirmation, he telephoned to General Lascroux and advised him of this turn of events. At 1810, the latter accordingly radioed orders to Marrakech and Casablanca to refrain from active hostilities pending the negotiation of an armistice. About an hour later the exact text of Admiral Darlan's orders was telephoned from Oujda to General Noguès, and transmitted by him to Generals Lascroux and Lahoulle and to Admiral Michelier. They were instructed to arrange for a meeting of General Noguès with the American commander next day.[1]

At about 0200 on 11 November, a French car, heralded by the blowing of a bugle, its lights on, and white flags flying, appeared at an outpost of Company G, 30th Infantry, northeast of Fedala, carrying two French officers and two enlisted men from Rabat. This group was conducted to the regimental command post and thence to task force headquarters at the Hotel Miramar in Fedala, bearing orders from General Lascroux to General Desré, that the Casablanca Division cease firing. Colonel Gay, as General Patton desired, authorized the four Frenchmen to continue through American lines to Casablanca, but warned them that they must return quickly with an agreement to negotiate an armistice if the city were to escape the drastic consequences of the coordinated attack scheduled for daybreak. Otherwise, the attack would not be postponed. Admiral Hewitt was at once informed that an agreement to suspend all hostilities was imminent and would be made known to him as soon as possible.[2] The French reply, an agreement to terminate hostilities at once and to arrange terms at an afternoon conference in Fedala, was received at Headquarters, Western Task Force, only a few minutes before the attack was scheduled to begin. The ships were taking up firing positions, planes assembling, and field artillery batteries alerted for the preparation fire when the cease-fire orders were flashed. The orders, however, did not reach every American unit in time, and for a few minutes gunfire opened from tanks and from the 39th Field Artillery Battalion south of Casablanca, only to be suppressed by the commander when the failure of the air bombardment to take place indicated a change in plans.

[1] WTF Final Rpt, Operations TORCH, G–2 Annex, Item 10 (Rpt of Gen Noguès to His Staff) and Item 11 (Journal of Actions of the High Command of Moroccan Troops, 8–11 Nov 42). DRB AGO.

[2] (1) Interv with Brig Gen Hobart R. Gay, 1 Feb 48. (2) Patton Diary, 11 Nov 42. (3) Taggart, *History of the Third Infantry Division in World War II*, p. 30. (4) Ltr, Noguès to author, 23 Jan 51, notes on Amer landings.



ARRIVING AT FEDALA TO NEGOTIATE AN ARMISTICE, *1400, 11 November 1942. Gen. Auguste Paul Noguès (left) is met by Col. Hobart R. Gay. Gen. Auguste Lahoulle, Commander of French Air Forces in Morocco, is on the right. Gen. Georges Lascroux, Commander in Chief of Moroccan troops, carries a brief case.*

The defenders of Casablanca, represented by Admiral Ronarc'h and General Desré, surrendered to General Anderson shortly before noon at the headquarters of the Casablanca Division. American troops were to occupy the key positions in the area while the French troops remained in barracks but retained their arms. General Anderson himself shifted his Headquarters, Sub-Task Force BRUSHWOOD, from the Villa Coigny in Fedala to the Villa Mas in one of Casablanca's suburbs. At Safi, parallel action took place early next day.

At General Patton's urgent request, conveyed by an advance party which included General Eagles and Col. Harry McK. Roper, Admiral Michelier went from Casablanca to Fedala to participate in armistice negotiations at General Patton's headquarters in the Hotel Miramar. The presence of Michelier, the naval commander in chief, led Admiral Hewitt to come ashore to join

TABLE 4—BATTLE CASUALTIES SUSTAINED BY THE ALLIED FORCES IN THE ALGERIAN-FRENCH MOROCCAN CAMPAIGN: 8–11 NOVEMBER 1942

Organization	Total	Killed	Wounded	Missing
Total	1,469	530	887	52
U. S. Forces	* 1,404	526	837	41
1st Infantry Division	313	85	221	7
3rd Infantry Division	293	76	208	9
9th Infantry Division	225	80	144	1
34th Infantry Division	78	30	47	1
1st Armored Division	305	191	105	9
2nd Armored Division	9	4	5	0
Army and Corps Troops	114	19	90	5
Twelfth Air Force	67	41	17	9
British Forces [b]	65	4	50	11

* These preliminary data (April 1945) differ somewhat from Final Report of Battle Casualties of World War II (TAG, June 1953). The final report, totaling 449 killed in action, 720 wounded, and 85 captured or missing, however, does not show distribution by division.

[b] Data are for British Commandos during 8–17 November 1942. Does not include possible casualties suffered by the British First Army in unopposed landings in Algeria.

Sources: U. S. data are from Battle Casualties of the Army (preliminary), 1 April 1945, prepared by Machine Records Branch, AGO. British data were supplied by the British Cabinet Office, Historical Section.

the conference. With the arrival of General Noguès from Rabat, about 1400, it was soon possible to begin formal negotiations. At this session, the French leaders would discover to what extent the military opposition of the past three days had forfeited the sort of partnership offered them at the beginning. Their resistance had cost the U.S. Army and Navy 337 killed, 637 wounded, 122 missing, and 71 captured.[3] French losses had been much heavier.

The scene which ensued remained indelibly impressed on the memories of those present. It was World War I Armistice Day. A guard of honor had been established. With great dignity General Patton received the French commanders, complimented them on the effectiveness of their forces, and had read to them the draft armistice terms which had been approved before the operation by the Combined Chiefs of Staff.[4] Of the two prepared sets of terms, one was clearly irrelevant, for it presupposed only a token French resistance. The other was also inappropriate, for it envisaged prolonged fighting resulting in the destruction of French military power. No draft terms took adequate cognizance of the Allied dependence on continued French capacity to control the Sultan's native subjects, or of the French legal position as the Sultan's pro-

[3] (1) WTF Final Rpt, Annex 4 (G–1 Annex), 7 Jan 43, (2) Memo with incls, Bureau of Personnel USN for Chief Hist Div Spec Staff U.S. Army, 31 Mar 50, sub: Naval casualties during North African occupation 8 Nov 42–9 Jul 43. OCMH. Later reports give higher figures. (*Table 4*)

[4] Copy in Civil Affairs—Col Gay 1942 file, Kansas City Rcds Ctr.

tector. The harsh arrangements which otherwise might have been imposed were therefore dismissed as inapplicable. Instead, an informal understanding was adopted, a gentleman's agreement that the Americans should occupy areas required for security and for future operations, that prisoners should be exchanged, that the French should be confined to barracks but not disarmed, and that without General Eisenhower's approval no punishment should be inflicted on anyone for having assisted the Americans. Lasting terms were left for determination in Algiers, where negotiations were in progress, as will be narrated later.

When this generous arrangement had been concluded, the anxieties of the French were revived by General Patton's insistance that one more requirement must be met, and were then suddenly relieved by his explanation of its nature. For he proposed a toast—to the liberation of France by the joint defeat of the common enemy.[5]

At Gibraltar, meanwhile, the fragmentary character of the reports from the Western Task Force which filtered through the overburdened communications system to the Commander in Chief, Allied Force, had become increasingly disturbing with the passage of each day. On 10 November, General Eisenhower informed General Patton in a personal communication that Algiers had been won for two days, Oran's defenses were rapidly crumbling, and the only "tough nut" was in Patton's hands. "Crack it open quickly and ask for what you want," the message said. Next day a British plane, sent to gain information, was shot down. On 12 November, Rear Adm. Bernhard H. Bieri and a small Army staff went to Casablanca by fast mine sweeper (H.M.S. *Welshman*) to check with Admiral Hewitt and General Patton, and to transmit instructions. By that time, the military situation in Morocco was no longer in doubt.

Enemy Submarines Attack

Hostilities between the French and the Americans in the Casablanca area ceased only two days before the expected arrival of a second convoy of four personnel and twenty cargo transports and escorting warships. When the fighting stopped, the transports off Fedala were pushing cargo into that small port at a rate which would require at least a week for completion. This slow rate of unloading heightened the risk of using the offshore anchorage in the Fedala roadstead. Neither the destroyer screen nor the new mine field furnished complete security against expected Axis submarines.[6]

The situation subjected Admiral Hewitt to an exceedingly difficult decision. If the transports were moved to Casablanca, they could finish unloading in reasonable security and the matériel would be concentrated there instead of being set ashore in two places. But the harbor would first have to be cleared of idle ships. This task would delay unloading and force the second convoy to cruise off the coast instead of coming directly into port, holding the troops at sea that

[5] (1) Intervs with Gen Gay, 1 Feb 48, Gen Keyes, 15 Feb 50, and Gen Jean Piatte (French), 10 Jan 50. (2) Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations*, II, 164–65.

[6] On 8 November 1942 fifteen German submarines were ordered to stations from Safi to Fedala, and two days later, *Group Schlagtot*, consisting of eight submarines, was in action off Casablanca. The enemy's undersea line was extended to the Strait of Gibraltar and reinforced by 12–13 November. (1) *SKL/1.Abt, KTB, Teil A, 1.–30.XI.42*, 8 Nov 42. (2) *SKL/1.Abt, Beilage zum KTB, Teil B–IV, Ergaenzungen zur Ubootslage vom 1.X.42 bis 31.XII.42.*



LT. GEN. DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER AT GIBRALTAR *holds a press conference with U.S. and British correspondents, 10 November 1942.*

much longer. To leave the transports at anchor off Fedala would be to rely heavily on the tide of good fortune which had supported American naval activities thus far, but it would expedite the entire operation. Admiral Hewitt decided to keep the vessels off Fedala. All Army personnel except 180 casualties in sick bays were sent ashore on 11 November. The fifteen ships, including some which had just begun to discharge cargo—the *Joseph Hewes,* the *Edward Rutledge,* the *Hugh L. Scott,* and the *Tasker H. Bliss*—continued unloading under such protection as a diligent screening group could furnish.

Axis submarines came indeed. *U–173* struck the *Hewes* and the tanker *Winooski* with torpedoes from the west, early in the evening of 11 November, and before leaving hit the destroyer *Hambleton.* During the next morning several submarines of *Group Schlagtot* attacked the *Ranger* well out at sea and forced her to engage in violent evasive movement to escape torpedoes which swept close by her. On the afternoon of 12 November the *U–130* approached from the northwest in 100 feet of water, slipped between the transports at Fedala and the shore, avoided the mine field, and, taking careful aim during a calm sunset, sent six torpedoes in quick succession into the *Scott,*

the *Rutledge,* and the *Bliss.*[7] Fires raced through the vessels, each of which sank during the night. Hundreds of surviving sailors were taken into Fedala and two days later brought to Casablanca by train. The other ships of the Center Attack Group formed into column and steamed out to more open waters. Five of the transports went next day into Casablanca where they completed unloading before 15 November and took aboard the survivors from the sunken ships.[8] Except for treatment at a shore party dressing station, over 100 casualties had to wait until they were on transports for thorough medical attention.[9] Seven more ships of the Fedala group with five from Mehdia docked at Casablanca on 15 November and began discharging cargo around the clock. The ships had to be ready to start back to the United States on 17 November.

The second convoy hovered off the Moroccan coast. On 17 November, the bulk of the Western Naval Task Force left the harbor, assembled behind a newly laid protective mine field, and departed; on 18 November, this convoy was able to come in. Mountainous piles of half-sorted supplies and ammunition on Casablanca's docks were being eroded steadily by the strenuous efforts of Army units and native labor gangs. Operations of the U.S. Army in this part of Northwest Africa were already entering the next phase.

[7] (1) Supplies lost on the torpedoed ships were: *Hewes,* 93 percent; *Rutledge,* 97 percent; *Scott,* 67 percent; *Bliss,* 64 percent. A considerable loss of vehicles on the *Rutledge* and *Bliss* also occurred. CTG 34.9 Action Rpt, Incl D. (2) Extract from War Diary of *U–130,* 11 Jun 41–13 Mar 43, 12 Nov 42, Incl D to COMNAVEU Rpt (I.D. No. 251776).

[8] The transports were the *Leonard Wood, Thomas Jefferson, Charles Carroll, Thurston,* and *Elizabeth C. Stanton.*

[9] CTG 34.9 Action Rpt, Incl E.

Political Conditions

The Americans intended that the general character of the new relationship between them and the French in Morocco should follow the formula of "forgive and forget." The American flag would henceforth fly but the French flag would not be lowered. American forces would occupy key positions, but the French otherwise would not be dispossessed. Military facilities previously defended would now be at the disposal of the Americans. All flights from Moroccan airfields would be under American control. For the victorious visitors, this formula was easier to follow than it was for the French, whose memories of the recent events rankled. At the higher levels of command, the changes seemed to be made with no great difficulty. Admiral Michelier soon held a position of confidence and esteem among the American commanders. General Noguès qualified as an invaluable agent. But to the officer corps of the three armed services, particularly the higher grades of the Navy, as well as to pro-Axis civilian sympathizers, the situation was galling.

Circumstances surrounding the imprisonment of General Béthouart illustrated the prevailing attitudes. General Béthouart and his associates accepted the leadership of General Giraud in bringing about an active partnership between the French forces in North Africa and the Allies four days before General Noguès, Admiral Michelier, and their immediate subordinates adopted the same course under the leadership of Admiral Darlan. Darlan professed to have the authorization of Marshal Pétain,[10] but he also accepted General Giraud as his principal military commander in North Africa.

[10] See pp. 262–65.

Béthouart should have occupied a like position of trust and honor in Morocco. Indeed, had all these men been politicians, Béthouart and his associates could have made incontestable claims to major rewards for being the first to act. But they were military men in an Army zealous to maintain its integrity, and Béthouart's group had clearly broken the bonds of military discipline, even though acting under the highest sense of patriotic duty. They had been *"dissident."* In French military hands they were actually in danger of paying with their lives for anticipating the orders which their superiors were to issue four days later, after Darlan had taken the responsibility on his shoulders. General Noguès, who had believed Admiral Michelier rather than General Béthouart on the night of 7–8 November, initiated measures to bring Béthouart to trial, but General Patton insisted that "no action whatsoever would be taken against him except upon final approval by General Eisenhower." [11] As soon as Béthouart's plight was made known through American channels to General Giraud and thence to General Eisenhower, the Allied commander in chief interceded on 15 November to request the immediate release not only of General Béthouart but of "any others now in prison for the same kind of reason." On 17 November, Béthouart and Col. Pierre Magnan, commander of the troops which had shielded him at Rabat on the night of the unsuccessful coup, were released and taken to Algiers by American airplane.[12]

General Patton sought to prevent or to mitigate the punishment of all who were held in French custody for pro-Allied conduct before the surrender, and eventually to procure their release. Screening those who merited release as purely political prisoners from others was a process bound to take time, since it would be necessary to depend upon the counsel of reliable men who knew French Moroccan politics. With the invasion, an entirely new group of Americans was substituted for those who had previously served the interests of the United States in Morocco. Although Mr. Frederic P. Culbert was selected from the Office of Strategic Services representatives among the consular staff to be General Patton's deputy adviser on civil affairs with broad authority, the staff as a whole was not used effectively to protect the preinvasion friends of the Allies.[13]

The Americans discouraged all attempts at reprisal during the period of released restraint following the French capitulation. Wherever it could be done with effect they publicly demonstrated support of exactly the same police and military agencies which had previously been in control. For an undue length of time pro-American French remained in custody, while those hostile to the Allies before the landings, followers of Pierre Laval, remained in positions of trust and power. The Frenchmen of authoritarian sympathies, some of them members of fascistic societies like the *Service d'Ordre Lé-*

[11] Memo, CG WTF for CinC AF, 14 Nov 42, sub: Case of Béthouart and his adherents. AFHQ AG 336–62, Micro Job 24, Reel 78D.

[12] (1) Memo, Gen Gruenther for Clark, 15 Nov 42; Memo, Patton for Eisenhower, 15 Nov 42, sub: Co-operation of French authorities; Ltr, Eisenhower to Noguès, 15 Nov 42. AFHQ AG 336, Micro Job 24, Reel 78D. (2) Gen Emile Béthouart, The Occurrences of November 8 in Morocco. Copy in transl in OCMH. (3) Interv with W. Stafford Reid, 13 Feb 48. (4) Msg, David King to Lt Col William A. Eddy for Robert Murphy, 14 Nov 42. CIA OSS Archives.

[13] (1) Ltr, Patton to Culbert, Nov 42. In private possession. (2) TORCH Anthology. CIA OSS Archives.

gionnaire des Anciens Combattants and the *Parti Populaire Française* and others in less formal associations, seemed prepared even to assist an Axis counterinvasion. They propagandized against the Allies. Frenchmen of pro-Allied views, whether Giraudist or Gaullist, were the object of their surveillance and open hostility. Specific denunciations of these anti-American individuals to American civilian officials were of little or no avail, for their hands were tied by military control. The position which General Patton took was that "the anti-Darlan-Nogues group does not have the personnel nor is it in a position to control Morocco if given that mission." [14] General Patton's conclusion may be subject to challenge but not to disproof, for the surviving evidence is partisan and inconclusive.

A sweeping shift of administration in French Morocco would have required the retirement of General Noguès from the residency. He had won the hostility of the anti-Vichy French before the American landings in Morocco. He could not expect it to diminish as a result of his conduct during the landings and the negotiations in Algiers which followed. His ambiguous behavior then excited distrust, and he was made to bear the major blame for the fighting and for the resulting losses. His initial choice was founded upon an erroneous military estimate by Admiral Michelier, and upon his wish to maintain the integrity of the French Army.[15] His conduct of the operations was in obedience to General Juin's standing orders and was intended to avert or delay German military intervention. He tried to avoid the evil consequences to France of an obvious and voluntary defection of French Morocco to the Allies in violation of France's obligations to the Axis powers under the armistice, but he had no opportunity to arrange with the Americans any pseudo defense involving little damage to either side which might mislead the enemy. He was suspected of maintaining ties with Vichy and perhaps thus with the Germans even after 15 November. In general, he was the victim of the lack of forthrightness which characterized his political, as distinguished from his military, role. Successful control of French Morocco through the intricate structure of French supervision and native rule required qualifications not readily found anywhere and certainly not in the Western Task Force. For lack of a substitute, General Noguès was more necessary to the Americans than those who protested against his retention. General Patton became in effect a defender of General Noguès as an indispensable agent who could keep the native population in hand while the French in Morocco were in general kept friendly or neutral.[16]

Early in December General Giraud visited French Morocco, where General Keyes was in command during General Patton's absence on a trip to AFHQ in Algiers and to Tunisia. The military leader in the effort of French North Africa to gain liberation for the mother country was enthusiastically received by the populace. He made it possible for French enlisted men who had deserted to the Americans during the November fighting in Morocco to return to their units without punishment. Pro-American officers were, he promised, not to be neglected.

[14] Ltr, Patton to Eisenhower, 19 Nov 42. AFHQ Micro Job 24, Reel 136D.

[15] See pp. 94–95 above.

[16] Intervs with Reid, 13 Feb 48, and Culbert, 24 Feb 48.

The Western Task Force After the Surrender

The situation facing the Western Task Force following the capitulation of the French was difficult. Any appearance of overwhelming superiority was superficial. The French might no longer challenge American strength, but, as indicated above, it remained to be seen how genuine their co-operation would be. Between the French and the natives, the imperialist relations of the protectorate rested upon the French military and the French police. Allied propaganda had encouraged among the Moslem and native Jewish population the hope of liberation from the French. Between Moslems and Jews endless animosities threatened to boil over unless firmly suppressed. In the native situation, therefore, was the basis for a dangerous diversion from complete concentration on the major military objectives of the Allies.

The French and the Spanish Governments shared the role of protectors over the realm of the Sultan of Morocco. The boundary between the two areas under their respective controls was one which the Spanish desired to see much farther south. Should the Spanish forces stationed north of the boundary succumb to the temptation to strike while the French were weakened, American forces would almost certainly become embroiled. If the Axis used Spanish bases for air or ground attacks upon the supply lines across northern Morocco, the Western Task Force would be required to join in countermeasures. Thus the force commanded by General Patton, barely sufficient for the amphibious assault, incompletely established on shore, dependent on subsequent increments of men and matériel to renew the power of attack, and intruded among a population of great political complexity at a distance of 4,000 miles from the United States and over 400 miles from Oran, felt obliged to move with circumspection, to co-operate rather than to command.

Western Task Force headquarters was established temporarily in Casablanca. To check on the situation at interior points various inspection trips were made. From the 47th Infantry regimental headquarters in Safi, officer patrols visited Mazagan, Mogador, and Marrakech, while from General Truscott's headquarters in Port-Lyautey, another party made a trip through the Taza gap to Msoun, about 20 miles southeast of Taza, stopping at Petitjean, Meknès, and Fès, and returning through Rabat–Salé. From Casablanca a patrol to Kasba Tadla confirmed the reports made from all such visits to the military and civilian leaders, that the French were well-disposed and ready to co-operate. Systematic air reconnaissance extended from 20 miles offshore to more than 100 miles inland, between Agadir and Guercif. Within this area, ground reconnaissance also covered the territory inland to the base of the Atlas Mountains, with a farther extension northeast of Fès.

Areas of special responsibility along the coast were assigned. The 47th Infantry Regiment remained in Safi to the end of November, and a detachment remained there even later. Casablanca and Fedala were linked under the protection of the 3d Division, reinforced, less the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry. That unit, with the 2d Armored Division, was stationed in the vicinity of Rabat–Salé. The Mehdia–Port-Lyautey area was occupied by the 1st Provisional Brigade (Cavalry), General Truscott's command.

During the reorganization and redeployment of the Western Task Force, and other preparations for the future, the gigantic task of clearing the ports, establishing supply points, and unloading the succession of troops and cargo convoys was fulfilled.[17] Native labor and civilian transport were utilized, the former thus being able to purchase the cotton cloth, tea, and rice which were otherwise unobtainable. Battle damage to Casablanca Harbor was repaired as rapidly as possible. The sunken ships and drydock, the shell-pocked and burned wharves, and the damaged cranes and railway sidings were put in order. Defense of the harbor there, as well as the ports at Safi and Fedala, was organized around 105-mm. howitzers, antiaircraft batteries, and smoke generators. Airfields were reconditioned and improved, and protected by additional antiaircraft batteries and other ground units. The railroad and highway routes to the east were surveyed. French guards protected the bridges and tunnels. To solve the problem of stepping up the capacity of the railroad, it was necessary to increase the rolling stock and to import coal for use by locomotives east of Fès on the portion not electrified.

Military collaboration with the French proceeded steadily. French antiaircraft batteries were not only used to guard the Spanish Moroccan frontier and the routes to the east, but were also interspersed among American guns for the defense of Casablanca. French Army units were permitted to engage in training exercises and were taught the use of American weapons and eventually of American signal equipment. Operation of the coastal defense batteries taken from the French Navy-controlled units was returned to Admiral Michelier's men.[18] The French gave ample warning of an expected tide of great height on 13 December, so that when it came, tugs were able to recover American ships which had broken from their moorings.[19] French army units began to move eastward into Algeria for service along the line of communications and eventually for use in Tunisia.

During the first month following the French surrender, the primary concern of the Western Task Force shifted from insuring the ability to hold the area and to deter aggressive Spanish action to preparing for prospective battles elsewhere against Axis forces. American air units, after a training period, either moved eastward as a group or else contributed planes to other units already in combat. Ground units were consolidated, as far as possible. A striking instance was the 229-mile march of the 47th Infantry Regiment from Safi to Port-Lyautey which began on 1 December. With elements brought over since the assault, the 9th Division would eventually assemble near Port-Lyautey all its units except the 39th Infantry, which had been part of the Eastern Assault Force, and which was to stay in eastern Algeria. Armored units of the 2d Armored Division were concentrated east of Salé. The 3d Division's units were stationed near Fedala and Rabat, except for the 30th Infantry Regiment, which went to Guercif and Oujda to protect an airdrome and part of the line of communications

[17] Company C, 263d Quartermaster Battalion, worked to clear and operate the port of Safi until sent to Oran, en route to Tunisia, on 12 February 1943.

[18] Ltr, Patton to Eisenhower, 21 Nov 42. AFHQ G-3 Ops 77/3, Micro Job 10A, Reel 23C.

[19] Ltr, Patton to Eisenhower, 15 Dec 42. AFHQ G-3 Ops 77/1 Micro Job 10A, Reel 23C.

there. By early December the requirements of the Allied drive in Tunisia were reflected in the transfer by air to Bône and Blida of several antiaircraft batteries, and the prospective movement of others. Several French units, including the 7th Moroccan Tirailleurs Regiment, had already started for Tunisia. For those remaining in Morocco, the program was one of preparation by systematic training and field exercises.[20]

[20] See WTF G–3 Rpts 24–27, 9–12 Dec 42. AFHQ G–3 Ops 77/4, Micro Job 10A, Reel 23C.

PART THREE

THE AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

CHAPTER X

The Last Preliminaries

The Convoys Elude the Enemy

The amphibious operations in the Mediterranean for the capture of Oran and Algiers united elements of the U.S. Army, the British Army, and the Royal Navy in two joint expeditionary forces, supported by units of the U.S. Army Air Forces and the British Royal Air Force. The amount of training was generally below the requirements for success in operations against firmly defended shores. Here, as on the western coast of Morocco, the Allied Force had stretched its capacities to the limit. There had been no time even for precise forging of the Allied military instrument, much less for polishing it. It was rough cast in the proper mold and used with that fact in mind. The complications of amphibious operations were many under the best of circumstances, but by using one country's army with another's navy the Allies unavoidably increased those complexities. The forthcoming operations in the Mediterranean were consequently expected to be unexampled in difficulty as well as in scale.

Naval forces engaged in the Allied attacks entered the Mediterranean in conformity with an elaborate pattern which had been prepared at the British Admiralty for Operation TORCH.[1] In the van was the Covering Force (H), containing Vice Admiral Sir Neville Syfret's flagship, the *Duke of York,* and two other battleships, *Rodney* and *Renown,* the aircraft carriers *Victorious* and *Formidable,* three cruisers, and seventeen destroyers. The Covering Force had the mission of protecting the landing operations from interference by the Italian or Vichy French fleets, a task which might take it well to the northeast of the rest of the convoy. British submarines already in the Mediterranean took patrolling stations off Messina, off the northwestern corner of Sicily, and off Toulon. Aircraft from Gibraltar, Malta, or the United Kingdom began reconnaissance flights over the sea between Spain and Sardinia, between Sardinia and Sicily, and over southern French ports. The first two convoy sections, bound for Algiers, went through the straits during the night of 5–6 November, and the third, the slower section bound for Oran, passed into the Mediterranean during the afternoon of 6 November.

Spies reported the naval movements near Gibraltar to the Axis powers almost immediately. As early as 4 November, the Germans were aware of a threat but did not recognize its import. "In Gibraltar, the *Luftwaffe* has ascertained up to now the presence of one battleship, two aircraft carriers, five cruisers, and 20 destroyers," noted the keeper of the *OKW/WFSt* War Diary; "the concentration of such important naval forces in the western Mediterranean seems to indicate an imminent operation, perhaps another convoy to Malta." Marshal Caval-

[1] See pp. 71–72 above.

lero on the same day considered the possibility of an Allied landing on the coast of Africa. Before midnight, 5–6 November, he was informed that Allied transports were actually entering the Mediterranean.[2]

The warning, although early, was not early enough. The Axis powers had been led to expect Allied action on the Atlantic coast but did not anticipate an expedition to the Mediterranean. This consideration, and the necessity to protect the supply lines to their troops in Africa and the Balkans, had led the Germans and Italians to cluster their naval forces in the central and eastern Mediterranean instead of in the western Mediterranean where efforts to intercept Allied invasion convoys would be most effective. That the events of the next few days might well determine Rommel's fate in Africa and perhaps the Axis fortunes in the Mediterranean theater of war was well understood. Hitler sent a special message to the crews of the submarines and the motor torpedo boats there: "The existence of the African Army depends on the destruction of the English convoys. I await a ruthless victorious attack." [3]

Conflicting views and mistaken countermeasures frustrated all efforts during the next two days to determine the nature, strength, and destination of the Allied expedition. The fragmentary reports from air reconnaissance and the absence of reports from the submarine screen on which the Axis leadership was forced to base its deductions late on 6 November left room for disagreement. The *German Naval High Command* (*Oberkommando de Kriegsmarine*—OKM), which had held the view that a convoy for the relief of Malta was the most probable explanation of the Allied naval movements, now admitted the possibility of Allied landings. The rating of possible targets by the OKM, in their order of probability, was: "Tripoli–Bengasi, Sicily, Sardinia, the Italian mainland, and in the last place French North Africa." Kesselring expected the landings, if any, to be made far in the west out of the range of the Axis fighter-bombers. Hitler on the morning of 7 November was of the opinion that the Allies intended to stage a large-scale landing of four or five divisions at Tripoli or Bengasi in order to contribute to the destruction of Rommel's army by attacking from the rear, and informed Mussolini of this view. The Duce immediately replied that he expected the Allies to land on the French North African coasts, but Hitler, unmoved, continued to hold to his Tripoli–Bengasi theory. The Axis leaders yearned for a slaughter of British ships in the Sicilian straits in the manner of the attempted August convoy to Malta, hoping that such a triumph would offset the ill effects of the disaster of El 'Alamein. Kesselring was therefore ordered to concentrate his air units for such an operation, and if opportunity for it should not materialize, to be ready to harass a probable Allied entry in southern France. Early on 7 November the *Italian Naval High Command* (*Supermarina*) accepted the view that the various convoy sections were in fact two attacking forces bound for the African coast at Tabarka, Bougie, and Algiers, but it abandoned this view a little later in consequence of remonstrances by the *German Naval Command Italy* (*Deutsches Marinekommando Italien*). However, at the end of the day the Italians reverted to their view of the early

[2] (1) MS # C–065a (Greiner), 4 Nov 42. (2) *SKL/I.Abt, KTB, Teil A, 1.–30.XI.42,* 6 Nov 42. (3) Cavallero, *Comando Supremo,* p. 4 (6 Nov 42).

[3] (1) *SKL/I.Abt, KTB, Teil A, 1.–30.XI.42,* 6 and 7 Nov 42. (2) MS # C–065a (Greiner), 7 Nov 42.

morning and ordered the available Italian submarines shifted accordingly. Late in the afternoon OKM reviewed the situation and on the basis of the many contradictory reports came to the futile conclusion that it must be ready to meet all the possible Allied landings. The German submarines south of the Balearics were therefore shifted toward the French North African coast.

French forces in the Oran area had manned their coastal defenses on the night of 6–7 November, when the Algiers convoy was off Oran, and after the convoy passed the alarm went eastward with it. Plans were made on 7 November to mine the coastal waters off Tunisia during the following night in case the convoy was heading for Bizerte.[4]

The reaction of the French Government could not be predicted by the Axis powers. Shortly before his departure by train for Munich on the early afternoon of 7 November, for the customary annual celebration of the 1923 *Putsch,* Hitler ordered the units which had been designated for occupation of southern France (Operation *ANTON*) to be alerted. The Italians prepared to participate in that operation and also to execute long-standing plans for an independent seizure of Corsica in case the French should make common cause with the Allies.[5]

The convoy sections of the Allied expedition meanwhile proceeded on their courses, planned for them well in advance of the operation, although full responsibility passed to each naval task force commander when his ships reached the meridian running through Melilla, in Spanish Morocco. By miscalculating Allied destinations, the enemy forfeited his opportunity to strike the ships before they reached the landing beaches. Only three successful contacts were made with the Allied forces on 7 November, when 76 German planes were in the air, 9 German and 26 Italian submarines were stationed in the supposed paths of advance, and motor torpedo boat squadrons were ready for action if the weather permitted. An airplane hit the *Thomas Stone* at dawn, when it was almost 150 miles northwest of Algiers, bound for the beaches east of that city, and broke off its propeller and rudder. At sundown a submarine struck H.M.S. *Panther,* in the Covering Force, damaging but not sinking the ship. An enemy air strike on that force during the afternoon was repulsed. The Allied ships for Algiers passed south of the westernmost group of submarines and then swung toward the attack area somewhat to the east of another line of submarines intended to intercept them. The Oran convoy also stopped short of the submarines in the new positions to which they moved on 7 November.[6]

The attack on the *Thomas Stone* obliged her to stop while the convoy continued on its course. With the small corvette *Spey* as escort, the helpless transport waited dead in the water for arrival of a tug and other escort from Gibraltar. The 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry, was aboard and was thus held

[4] (1) *SKL/1.Abt, KTB, Teil A, 1.–30.XI.42,* 7 Nov 42. (2) MS # C–090, *Stellungnahme zu Berichten deutscher Offiziere* (General der Artillerie Walter Warlimont). General Warlimont was deputy chief of OKW/WFSt.

[5] (1) MS # C–065a (Greiner), 7 Nov 42. (2) Cavallero, *Comando Supremo,* pp. 366–74 (4–7 Nov 42).

[6] (1) *SKL/1.Abt, KTB, Teil A, 1.–30.XI.42,* 7 Nov 42. (2) The evidence concerning the attack on the *Thomas Stone,* while not conclusive, indicates that it was by a German airplane. A slight discrepancy in the reported positions of the ship and the aircraft raises some doubt, but the time of the air strike and absence of any reported German submarine attack near that time and place make attack by airplane seem probable.

back from participation in the assault. Its commanding officer, Maj. Walter M. Oakes, calculated that by using the landing craft of the transport the bulk of his unit might still complete the voyage to Algiers in time to join in its capture. He persuaded Capt. Olten R. Bennehof (USN) of the *Thomas Stone* to accept the risk of remaining for a few hours after dark without the protection of the *Spey* and with only two of his landing craft until the arrivals of the destroyers known to be on the way. At dusk, Oakes and over 700 men in twenty-four boats began a journey of about 150 miles with the *Spey* as escort. The motors of the small boats soon proved unequal to the demand. The night became a tedious succession of breakdowns and pauses for repair, interrupted by a brief period of excitement when one of the landing craft was mistaken for a submarine and subjected to fire. A rising easterly breeze at daybreak made quite apparent that the flotilla could not reach its destination that day. Leaving the boats, which eventually were scuttled or sunk by gunfire, the men crowded aboard the corvette and continued to the Algiers area, arriving late that evening. About two hours after the troops had left it, the *Thomas Stone* was found by two Royal Navy destroyers, which undertook towing operations. They were joined in this effort by a tug in early morning, 8 November, and despite great difficulties managed to bring the disabled ship into the port of Algiers three days later.[7]

[7] (1) Rpt of *Spey* (Comdr H. G. Boyd-Smith), 14 Nov 42, and Rpt of *Wishart* (Comdr H. G. Scott), 14 Nov 42, in App. V to Incl 2 (Rpt of The Naval Commander, Eastern Task Force) of NCXF, Report of Proceedings, Operation TORCH AFHQ Micro Job 8, Reels 16A–17A. (2) 39th Inf Hist, 23 Oct 43. (3) Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations*, II, 209–12.

Giraud's Associates in Oran and Algiers

The enemy's efforts to stop the transports were matched ashore by the preparations of Giraud's followers to aid the landings and forestall the needless sacrifice of French blood. Mr. Robert Murphy first warned General Mast that the attack would come soon and then on 4 November that it would take place four days later. The immediate response was irritation and dismay, for Mast, rightly surmising that this fundamental information had been withheld from him at the Cherchel staff conference, realized that the shortness of the remaining time would force General Giraud into making a most difficult choice and would jeopardize successful operations by the pro-Allied French organizations in Morocco, Oran, and Algiers. His insistence upon a delay of at least three weeks, which Murphy transmitted sympathetically to General Eisenhower, was firmly rejected in Washington and London as out of the question.[8] What remained was to spread the alert to General Béthouart, Col. Paul Tostain, the chief of staff of the Oran Division, and the large Algiers group.

Just as in French Morocco,[9] plans to assist the invasion had been formulated at Oran and Algiers. The key figure at Oran was Colonel Tostain, who was to be aided by a combined military and civilian group. Units of the 2d Zouaves Regiment were expected to seize control of the two main mili-

[8] (1) Algiers Dispatch 749 to Gen Handy for Adm Leahy, 31 Oct 42. Copy in WDCSA 381 TORCH (11–1–42) Sec 2. (2) Msg 4373, London to AGWAR, 1 Nov 42. ETOUSA Outgoing Cables, Kansas City Rcds Ctr. (3) Memo, Gen Marshall for Adms Leahy and King, 2 Nov 42; Memo, President for JCS, 2 Nov 42; Memo, Field Marshal Sir John Dill for COS, JSM 455, 2 Nov 42. Copies in WDCSA 381 TORCH (11–1–42) Sec 2.

[9] See pp. 90–92 above.

tary installations and to furnish arms for use by organized civilian units in seizing communications centers, principal officials, and Axis armistice commissioners. Guides were to be furnished to the invading troops. Sabotage of the port would be forestalled by civilian teams. Gen. Robert Boissau, commander of the Oran Division, was either to be persuaded to countenance an unresisted occupation of Oran or held in custody until that operation had been completed.

These plans demanded too much of Tostain, who went to Algiers to consult General Mast, Giraud's principal military adherent there, and returned to Oran on 6 November with the decision that he could not engage in insubordination so direct and complete. The American vice-consul, Mr. Ridgeway Knight, thereupon radioed a warning to Gibraltar that the plans for Oran were failing and that the Center Task Force must expect a hostile reception. The civilian teams could engage in special tasks, but the arrangements for paralyzing French resistance had to be abandoned.

In Algiers, however, the pro-Allied French organization rushed preparations for action on the night of 7–8 November. Military participants under General Mast included Colonel Baril at Kolea and Cap Sidi Ferruch, Lt. Col. Louis G. M. Jousse, garrison commander in Algiers, Brig. Gen. A. J. de Monsabert, commanding the Blida subdivision of the XIX[e] Région Militaire, and Col. Jean Van Haecke, chief of the *Chantiers de Jeunesse,* a youth organization with a camp at Blida. Other young Army officers were leaders of civilian groups organized to accomplish specific missions. The principal civilian leaders were Henri d'Astier, Jean Rigault, and José Aboulker; they had a following of a few hundred men who had accepted association for such a day as now approached. Plans were based upon General Mast's ability to issue orders to units of the Algiers Division, and to facilitate speedy Allied advance to Algiers and the Blida airdrome from the vicinity of Cap Sidi Ferruch. Algiers itself was to be neutralized by occupation of the many key positions in the great capital, and by having civilians masquerade (with the aid of Colonel Jousse) as regular *Volontaires de Place* in the city's system of civilian defense. They could expect the connivance of the police. Motor vehicles were made ready in secret. Firearms, which the Allies had failed to deliver, were limited to a small quantity of old rifles to be obtained from the military. The Villa des Oliviers, official residence of General Juin, would be surrounded. General Koeltz also was to be taken into protective custody. If the Allies could manage to take over the city within a few hours after landing, assuming that the preparations by General Mast's organization were adequate, they could do so almost without firing a shot, and could then confront the civil and military leaders with a *fait accompli.* All could then rally to General Giraud. Such was their hope.[10]

Eastward from Algiers, along the coast as far as Tunis, warnings on 7 November brought defensive forces to the alert. The pro-Allied French there awaited the appear-

[10] (1) *Les Cahiers Français,* No. 47 (August, 1943), pp. 14 ff., contains a detailed account based on a report by M. José Aboulker, attested by Colonel Jousse on 24 April 1943. (2) Barjot, *Le débarquement du 8 Novembre en Afrique du Nord* (Paris, 1949), pp. 128–34. (3) Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble,* p. 344. (4) René Richard and Alain de Serigny, *L'énigme d'Alger* (Paris, 1947), pp. 93–97. Also published under the title *La bissectrice de la guerre, Alger 8 Novembre 1942* (Algiers, 1946). (5) Kammerer, *Du débarquement Africain au meurtre de Darlan* pp. 195–200.

ance of the invaders before taking overt steps.

Giraud at Gibraltar

Shortly after 1500, 7 November, General Giraud's party arrived at Gibraltar where, as already noted, it was anxiously awaited. Within an hour, Giraud was in conference with General Eisenhower and being briefed on the operation to begin a few hours later. When apprised in detail of the plans, Giraud, as he later declared, was favorably impressed by all but four significant features. Had the landing forces taken sufficient pains to appear to the French as allies rather than conquerors? Had sufficient preparations been made to gain Tunisia? Could there not be some provision for holding a bridgehead in southern France? What was the plan for his assumption of command? The last matter, which had been deferred in preliminary negotiations, became at Gibraltar the subject of prolonged and sometimes heated discussions extending beyond the time when the transports had begun to disembark troops.

General Giraud probably believed that he already held the President's acceptance of his explicit requirement that he be inter-allied supreme commander wherever Allied troops fought beside French troops on French soil. He was convinced that he must have the supreme command if he were to succeed in rallying the French Army and civilian population in North Africa without considerable bloodshed. He thought it appropriate for an officer of his seniority, experience, and special knowledge of French North Africa to take precedence over a younger American whose extraordinary qualifications were then less apparent than they later became.

General Eisenhower knew that the command was not his to bestow. He had no pertinent instructions from the Combined Chiefs of Staff, the source of his authority, and no reason to expect in the future any instructions granting command over American and British forces to a French officer. He found Giraud unwilling to accept any responsibility to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, and convinced that he must appear before the French as a free national leader, not as the appointee of the Allies. At the same time, Giraud proposed to lead the Allied forces in conformity with his own strategic judgments. With resolute persistence, he refused to accept the role which the Allies had planned for him, that of commander in chief of French forces only. The colloquy ended as the fighting began.[11] Thus the pro-Allied French in Algiers were obliged to proceed without Giraud and in ignorance of his whereabouts and status.

While the conversations of General Eisenhower with General Giraud were still going on in the Rock of Gibraltar, the Center and Eastern Task Forces were approaching their objectives at Oran and Algiers. In advance of the approach, five British submarines lay off the attack areas of Oran and Algiers surveying by periscope those sectors of the coast where the landings were to be made. Each submarine had as passengers men who were to guide the shoreward movement of landing craft in the assault. One man was to act as pilot officer in the leading wave for each landing beach, while another in a collapsible boat took a position close to shore from

[11] Msg 113, Gibraltar to AGWAR for CCS, 0232, 8 Nov 42. Copy in Smith Papers. This message reported the conclusion of Generals Eisenhower and Clark and Admiral Cunningham that Giraud was playing for time to escape responsibility for the shedding of French blood, since he must have known that his claim was unacceptable.

which to mark the beach by light signal for the last stage of the approach. After familiarizing themselves with the landmarks as best they could through the periscopes by day, they used the small craft at night to ascertain the inner pilotage conditions. On 4 November, one team was driven by a storm out to sea in the area west of Algiers, and was rescued by a trawler which took the men into that port. The others waited until after darkness on 7 November when the submarines took the stations at which the convoys were expected to find them.[12]

Not long after nightfall on 7 November 1942, the Oran and Algiers convoys reached the points at which sections began diverging to reach the transport and fire support areas designated for the various separate landings. The aircraft carriers with their screens followed to appointed stations farther out to sea. North of Algiers, the Covering Force stood ready to ward off an attack by enemy surface forces and to detach certain heavy units for temporary service with the naval task forces. Already at sea in the Atlantic were troop and cargo convoys coming from the United Kingdom with reinforcements and bringing in particular elements of the Eastern Task Force to exploit success at Algiers by invading Tunisia. A few hours earlier than on the Moroccan coast the attack against Algeria would begin.

[12] Rpts of KOODOO and INHUMAN Parties in Incl 6 (Miscellaneous Reports of Proceedings) of *NCXF,* Report of Proceedings, Operation TORCH. AFHQ Micro Job 8, Reels 16A–17A.

CHAPTER XI

The First Day's Operations Against Oran

The Arrival of the Center Task Force Off Oran

With the fall of darkness on 7 November, the Center Naval Task Force turned from its course east of Oran and doubled back toward the landing areas at which three major sections of the ground troops were to be set ashore. The lights along the coast were still burning shortly before midnight as the combat-loaded transports and their escorts met beacon submarines north of Cap Figalo and Cap Carbon. (*Map IV*) Oran was to be gained by an envelopment from three beachheads to be established far to the east and west of the city, outside the wide bight between Cap Falcon and Pointe de l'Aiguille. More than fifty miles lay between the easternmost and westernmost landing points.

The plan of attack prescribed amphibious landings by (1) an armored task force (GREEN) at Mersa bou Zedjar, (2) one regimental combat team (26th) at Les Andalouses, (3) two regimental combat teams (18th and 16th), and (4) a second and larger armored task force (RED) near Arzew.[1] The eastern landings near Arzew were to be facilitated by (5) the 1st Ranger Battalion, which was expected to send parties clambering up the heights southeast of Cap Carbon to take one coastal battery and into Arzew Harbor to capture another. (6) A paratroop task force was to be brought to La Sénia and Tafaraoui airfields, and (7) a small force (RESERVIST) was to make a direct assault on Oran harbor to prevent destruction of the port facilities which were so necessary for later operations. The armored task forces were expected to thrust inland before daylight to insure the early capture of the airfields, particularly those at Tafaraoui and La Sénia, and to close on Oran from the south. The infantry units were directed to encircle the city from west and east and to block the approach of reinforcements from interior stations. To accomplish this mission the main body of the 1st Infantry Division, landing at Arzew, was ordered to gain and hold a division beachhead line extending from the heights of Djebel Khar, a prominent feature located between Pointe Canastel and St. Cloud, through Fleurus, then skirting the northern end of a salt lake and the road junction south of En Nekala, and reaching the Golfe d'Arzew just east of La Macta. The 26th Infantry was to capture Djebel Santon and Djebel Murdjadjo dominating the western approach to Oran.

Naval forces were to furnish gunfire support, to protect the transport areas and landing beaches from seaborne interference, and, in the initial phases preceding the capture of airfields, to provide all available air support. Two destroyers each were assigned for fire support off Mersa bou Zedjar and Les Andalouses, and two destroyers and the

[1] See Ch. III above.

cruiser *Jamaica* for the same role at the Golfe d'Arzew. The cruiser *Aurora* took its station north of Mers el Kébir, while farther out were the battleship *Rodney* (with 16-inch guns able to fire over twenty miles) and three destroyers. All naval gunfire was to be withheld until it became certain that surprise had been lost. Counterbattery fire was thereafter permissible, but after 1245, when Allied troops were expected to have occupied most of the beachhead, it was to be directed at batteries actually firing and at the same time well clear of Allied troops and of Arzew, unless specifically ordered by Commodore Troubridge. Five British forward observation officers were to move inland with the separate elements of the landing force to direct naval gunfire on appropriate targets. Patrolling motor launches off Oran and each of the landing zones were to furnish an antisubmarine screen. The naval air support would come from the carriers *Furious, Biter,* and *Dasher* (fifty-seven aircraft), between twenty and thirty miles offshore, protected by the antiaircraft cruiser *Delhi* and screened by destroyers.

The defenses of Oran against these forces were far from negligible. Sea approaches to Oran and Arzew were protected by thirteen batteries of coastal guns, some of which could be turned against inland targets. The heaviest were the four 7.6-inch guns on Djebel Santon and the three 9.4-inch guns on Pointe Canastel.[2] Naval gun crews were estimated to total 4,000, including troops who manned antiaircraft weapons adjacent to the coastal batteries. The strength of the Oran Division (General Boissau) in the area was estimated at 10,025, a figure expected to reach almost 18,000 within twenty-four hours and 22,525 by D plus 5 through reinforcements from inland stations. The Army airfield adjacent to the civilian airdrome at La Sénia, the Navy airfield at Tafaraoui, and the seaplane base at Arzew, were part of the defense system, and normally based just under 100 planes. At Mers el Kébir and in the western extremity of Oran harbor, several French naval vessels were usually moored.

The assault convoys succeeded in finding their beacon submarines in each case at about 2130 hours. After releasing motor launches to pick up the "leading-in officers" from the submarines, the transport groups for each beach, preceded by mine sweepers, headed for positions near which the first formations of landing craft were scheduled to assemble. While approaching the coast and then while waiting to leave the transport, troops heard the current broadcast of the Army-Notre Dame football game, via short-wave from New York City, over the public address system of at least one ship.[3]

The Royal Navy's methods of bringing assault troops to the assigned beaches near Oran (and Algiers) differed somewhat from those used by the U.S. Navy near Casablanca. British standing operating procedure required that, as convoys arrived at

[2] Other batteries from west to east were as follows: Cap Falcon, two 75-mm. guns; Aïn et Turk and Bouisseville, each four 75-mm. guns; Mers el Kébir, six 75-mm. guns; area of Ferme Ste. Marie and Ferme Combier, about four miles west of the harbor, four 90-mm. guns; Fort Lamoune, at the base of the breakwater, two 90-mm. guns; Ravin Blanc and Gambetta, each four 75-mm. guns (Gambetta also four 120-mm. guns); Pointe d'Espagnole, last of the eastern harbor defenses, two 75-mm. guns; Fort du Nord, at Arzew, four 105-mm. guns; and Fort de la Pointe, at Arzew, two 75-mm. guns. CTF FO 1, 4 Oct 42 Annex 1, App. A. (rev by Intell Sum 1, 12 Oct 42, and by 33d FA Bn AAR, 15 Nov 42).

[3] Memo by Sgt Gene J. Elzas, Co K 16th Inf, in Eyewitness Accounts of Battles by Camp Ellis Veterans of Foreign Campaigns, European Theater. OCMH.



ORAN, *looking northwest. Symbol* ① *indicates limit of penetration of H.M.S* Walney *and* ② *of H.M.S* Hartland.

rendezvous points marked by beacon submarines, motor launches should be sent to the submarines to take aboard the piloting teams for each beach. The submarines then proceeded toward a point nearer the shore, and released teams in portable boats which took positions still closer to the beaches. The motor launches meanwhile joined the flotillas of landing craft, assumed guiding stations in the first waves, and moved in with the assault. Landing craft crews were not expected to exercise the same degree of navigational skill as the trained and practiced guides, on whom, in consequence, a critical responsibility rested. After successful arrival of the first boat formations, the transports were to move in through mine-swept channels from first positions about five and a half miles offshore, thus shortening the round trips of later ship-to-shore movements.

The simultaneous landings by the several elements of the Center Task Force are here described in sequence from west to east, for at this stage, the pattern of operations can thus be most clearly recognized. Following the initial stage of penetration inland, actual progress of the attack was determined by the points of strongest French resistance, a fact which controls the organization of the narrative of that phase of the operation.[4]

[4] Rpt, CG CTF to CinC AF, 13 Nov 42, sub: Opn TORCH, with attached opns rpts of Parachute TF, TF GREEN, TF RED, and CCB 1st Armd Div. DRB AGO 95TF1-0.3, 24091 Master.

The Landings at Mersa bou Zedjar

The westernmost beachhead was that of armored Task Force GREEN, consisting of about one third of Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, under command of Col. Paul M. Robinett. Task Force GREEN was to operate directly under General Fredendall until in such proximity to the remainder of Combat Command B (Task Force RED) that control could be exercised effectively by the commander of that unit, Brig. Gen. Lunsford E. Oliver. Robinett's force was organized into assault troops, shore party, "flying column," and main body. No units were held in reserve before the landings.[5] One company of the assault troops was designated to land on each of X-Ray Beach's two sections to establish the beachhead and to signal when the headlands jutting into the bay from the beach had been cleared. The shore party—9 officers and 186 enlisted men of Company F, 591st Engineer Boat Regiment—was to operate in two separated sections to reconnoiter beach exits, find assembly areas for troop units and vehicles, and determine sites for supply dumps. It was ordered to construct roadways over the sand with Sommerfeld matting, to unload landing craft, to establish a medical aid station, to guide and control traffic on the beach, to assist in setting up signal communications and in defending the beach. While the beachhead was being linked by Army radio with Headquarters, Task Force GREEN, and with Headquarters, Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, and through the Royal Navy's beach signal party with the Senior Naval Officer Landings, X Beach (Capt. G. R. G. Allen, RN), on the *Batory*, as well as with Commodore Troubridge and General Fredendall on the *Largs*, the flying column and part of the main body were to be coming ashore.

The 1st Platoon, Reconnaissance Company, 13th Armored Regiment (1st Lt. Richard H. Van Nostrand), was expected to push inland on reconnaissance and security missions, setting up roadblocks near the crossing of the Rio Salado on the west and at Bou Tlélis on the east, and reporting the situation at Lourmel. The flying column was to move out as soon as it could be reorganized ashore, advancing first on Lourmel to secure the landing strip and other facilities there as well as to take over defense of the roadblocks and free the reconnaissance platoon for advance toward its next objective. It was then to prepare to attack either toward Tafaraoui or La Sénia, depending on progress of operations farther east. Battery D, 106th Separate Coast Artillery

[5] The total complement of Task Force GREEN was 103 officers, 4 warrant officers, and 2,150 enlisted men. *Assault troops* (Lt. Col. William B. Kern commanding) consisted of 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry (less Company B and detachments). *Shore party* (Capt. Kenneth Kennedy commanding) was Company F, 591st Boat Regiment, 1st Engineer Amphibious Brigade. *Flying column* (Lt. Col. John Todd commanding) included the 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment (less Companies A and B and a detachment of Headquarters Company); Company B, 6th Armored Infantry (less two platoons); the 2d Platoon, Company C, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion; and the 1st Platoon, Company A, 16th Armored Engineer Battalion (reinforced). *Main body* (Col. Robinett commanding) was comprised of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 13th Armored Regiment (less detachments); a detachment of the 141st Armored Signal Company; 1st Platoon, Reconnaissance Company, and Companies A and B, 13th Armored Regiment; Battery C, 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion; Battery D, 106th Separate Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion; two platoons of Company B, 6th Armored Infantry; Company C, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion (less one platoon); a platoon of Company B, 16th Armored Engineer Battalion (less detachment); and a detachment of Company B, 47th Armored Medical Battalion. Info from CTF Troop List, 21 Sep 42.

(AA) Battalion, was designated to set up its machine guns on the beach while waiting for the 40-mm. Bofors to be brought ashore. Units of the main body would assemble in assigned areas within the beachhead preparatory to an inland march as soon as conditions allowed.[6]

X-Ray Beach's two sections on the bay of Mersa bou Zedjar were separated by a jutting rocky headland. X WHITE Beach at the northeast was adjacent to the village and its inner edge was lined with small French houses. A second headland at the other end of X WHITE formed a sheltered cove with a narrow and dangerous entrance but with a depth which would permit a close approach to the beach itself. X GREEN Beach was more approachable but on a shallow bay. Both sections of X Beach extended inland about thirty yards to high dunes, and in the case of GREEN Beach, to a single exit up a steep slope over deep, soft sand. WHITE Beach permitted access to the village at two narrow points between the seaside dwellings. Small landing craft were to bring light vehicles and personnel from the troop transports to WHITE Beach.

Besides the *Batory,* the convoy at X Beach consisted of the transports *Queen Emma, Princess Beatrix, Benalbenach, Mary Slessor, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman,* and *Bachaquero.* Twenty light tanks and various other vehicles of the Task Force were on the *Bachaquero,* one of three Maracaibos used by the Center Task Force. They were, as stated earlier, prototypes of the LST's, converted to tank carriers from shallow-draft oilers used on Lake Maracaibo, Venezuela.[7] A group of thirty-nine landing craft could be assembled for unloading from the other vessels. Navigation at night into the cove was deemed too risky for the *Bachaquero,* which was directed to land at GREEN Beach as soon as the beachhead had been secured.

As the ships drew near to the point for initial release of landing craft, their schedule of landings was thrown awry by the fortuitous appearance, on a course paralleling the coast, of a small, fully lighted French convoy of five vessels bound for Oran under the escort of an armed trawler. One of them was stopped and boarded, but the others sped eastward until they sighted the Allied ships off Les Andalouses. They then reversed course. Hemmed in by the warships escorting the *Batory* and her group, these vessels ran ashore off Cap Figalo while their escort fled. The effect of their interference was to hold back the mine sweepers and disrupt the schedule of landings on X Beach.[8] A delay which at first threatened to be much longer was held to thirty-five minutes at WHITE Beach by bringing the transports to and lowering the landing craft while still more than a mile farther from shore than the plans provided. As the troop-filled boats assembled for the run to shore, the motor launch bringing the guide for the *Queen Emma*'s flotilla from the beacon submarine did not find that ship in time to lead in the assault. The boats started in at midnight on a passage bound to take more than an hour, from points not only farther out, but farther west than had been expected, because of a current for which allowance had not been made. During the passage to shore the motor of one of these landing boats caught fire, spreading to gasoline and fuel

[6] TF GREEN CCB 1st Armd Div FO 1, Oct 42.
[7] Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations,* II, 234.

[8] (1) NCXF, Report of Proceedings, Operation TORCH (cited hereafter as NCXF, TORCH Despatch), Incl 1 (Rpt of The Naval Commander, Center Task Force), App. I (Rpt of Capt G. R. G. Allen). AFHQ Micro Job 8, Reels 16A–17A. (2) The landing tables are in TF GREEN CCB 1st Armd Div FO 1, 12 Oct 42, Annex 1.



X WHITE BEACH ON THE BAY OF MERSA BOU ZEDJAR. *Note barriers to exit from beach.*

oil, and although the craft was abandoned and sunk, surface oil burned until after daylight. Surprise had been compromised.

As a consequence of these mishaps, the second wave at X GREEN Beach actually landed before the first, while on X WHITE Beach the scheduled sequence was more closely followed.[9] After the beachhead was reported secured by the assault troops commanded by Lt. Col. William B. Kern, the tank ship *Bachaquero,* touching bottom at 7 feet, came to a stop more than 360 feet offshore.[10] The 16th Armored Engineers worked for three hours to set up a pontoon bridge, but this did not quite reach dry ground.[11] The shallow bay caused difficulties also for the LCM's bringing in the lighter vehicles. They were pushed off the bottom by bulldozers but in the process sustained damage to rudders and propellers which eventually reduced the serviceable lighters from thirteen to three.

While the armored vehicles waited to use the bridge, and while landing craft brought in the lighter vehicles, other boats ferried personnel from ship to shore. Just as off the Moroccan coast, the boats had difficulty finding their way in the darkness to the proper transports, especially when return-

[9] The first landing at X Beach was reported at 0136. Msg, Col Robinett to CG CTF, 8 Nov 42, Entry 50, in CTF G–3 Jnl.

[10] (1) Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch," p. 35. (2) Msg, CO 13th Armd Regt to CG CTF, 0401, 8 Nov 42, Entry 47, in CTF G–3 Jnl.

[11] 16th Armd Engr Bn AAR, 3 Sep 43.

ing several miles from the beaches to the ships for second loadings. At the transports, some uncertainty was noted among the British naval officers in the boats and the U.S. Army officers on the decks as to who should take things in hand and expedite action.[12]

On being put ashore Lieutenant Van Nostrand's reconnaissance platoon struggled to get its vehicles over soft sand to firm ground, where it organized and at 0603 started inland up the black top road toward Lourmel. Tanks began rolling from the *Bachaquero* to the shallow water at the end of the pontoon bridge an hour later, all of them coming ashore before 0815.[13] Over metal road mat, they cleared the beach to firm ground. Headquarters, Task Force GREEN, was set up on the headland between GREEN and WHITE beaches as the tanks came in. The vehicles, guns, and equipment arrived in landing craft from the transports at a much slower rate.

The flying column started toward Lourmel at about 0900, shortly after word came of a clash between the reconnaissance platoon and a French armored car near the village. While Lt. Col. John Todd's force approached Lourmel, the spearhead group kept the village and airstrip under control and, about 1130, set up a roadblock southwest of Er Rahel on the approach from Tlemcen. Later in the day, reconnaissance was extended along the road to the southwest as far as Aïn Témouchent. Communications between X Beach and the units inland failed as they advanced down the southern slope of the hills between them and the coast. Radio contact between Headquarters, Combat Command B, at St. Leu and the inland elements of the GREEN flying column was also hampered and erratic until early on 10 November.[14] Back on the beaches, meanwhile, the unloading of vehicles and heavy equipment was expedited by using sections of ponton bridge as ferries from the *Benalbenach,* and, despite some misfortunes, the situation enabled part of the main body of Task Force GREEN to move during the afternoon through Lourmel toward the next objective.[15]

As previously noted, the force had alternative plans for movement either by the road south of the Sebkra d'Oran, in order to approach Tafaraoui airfield from the west, or along the highway between the southern base of Djébel Murdjadjo's rugged massif and the northern edge of the Sebkra d'Oran, in order to reach La Sénia airfield. Orders from General Oliver, Commanding General, Combat Command B, were at noon transmitted through Colonel Robinett to Colonel Todd, directing Task Force GREEN to use the shorter northern route to La Sénia. The GREEN column would thus operate independently until it had captured La Sénia airfield either alone or, if need be, in conjunction with elements of Task Force RED after the latter had secured Tafaraoui. Todd's flying column broke through French roadblocks at Bou Tlélis and Brédéa during the afternoon, and spent the night southwest of Misserrhin. Its radioed reports were not received after 1530 by Headquarters, Task Force GREEN, which followed from

[12] CTF Rpt, Lessons From Operation TORCH, 29 Dec 42. DRB AGO.

[13] Msgs, SNOL (X) to CG CTF, 8 Nov 42, Entries 91 and 110, in CTF G–3 Jnl. The ship pulled out at 0815. Other vehicles included six motorcycles, twenty-seven half-tracks, one self-propelled 37-mm. gun, four 37-mm. towed guns, sixteen quarter-ton trucks, and a signal truck and trailer.

[14] Interv with Brig Gen Paul M. Robinett, 7 Mar 49.

[15] (1) 13th Armd Regt S–2 Jnl, 8 Nov 42–9 May 43. (2) 1st Bn 6th Armd Inf Sum Jnl, 8 Nov 42–9 May 43. (3) CTF G–3 Jnl, 8–11 Nov 42.

Lourmel a few hours later, and which bivouacked southwest of Bou Tlélis that night.[16]

The Landings at Les Andalouses (Y Beach)

On Y Beach near Les Andalouses, the 26th Combat Team of the 1st Infantry Division under Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt, assistant division commander, and Col. Alexander N. Stark, Jr., commanding officer of the 26th Infantry, commenced its landing operations in circumstances somewhat similar to those at X Beach.[17] The transport group consisted of *Glengyle, Monarch of Bermuda, Llangibby Castle, Clan MacTaggart, and Salacia,* escorted by the cruiser H.M.S. *Aurora.* The Senior Naval Officer Landings, Y Beach, was Capt. E. V. Lees (RN) on the *Glengyle.* Forty-five landing craft of different types were distributed among these ships. While the *Aurora* engaged the small French convoy which disrupted the scheduled landings at Mersa bou Zedjar, and drove it back to the west, the transports lowered their boats at 2320 and commenced the slow disembarkation of assault troops. The ladders thrown down the sides of the *Monarch of Bermuda* had rungs two feet apart, so that the heavily loaded soldiers, each carrying almost ninety pounds, made their way down in darkness at an unexpectedly slow rate. The landing craft with the first wave from this transport joined those from the *Glengyle* and started the six-mile run to shore at 2345, led in by Lt. T. E. Edwards (RN) in a motor launch. About an hour later, the troops could see the flashing signal from the team near shore, but the first of the craft from the *Monarch of Bermuda* did not reach their portion of Y Beach until after H Hour (0100), while those from the *Glengyle* made such slow time that they did not touch down until 0116. The delay in the schedule was not very troublesome because there was no enemy resistance, but what did prove thoroughly disrupting was the discovery of an unexpected sandbar paralleling the shore. It had a clearance of from six inches to three and a half feet at different points, but what the incoming forces did not realize was that the water between it and the beach was often as much as five feet deep. The first of the small boats cleared the bar, but the first three LCM's from the *Glengyle,* arriving in the third boat wave, stopped at 0145 and disembarked jeeps and guns, which started forward, rolled under water, and had to be salvaged much later.

Combat Team 26's second assault wave meanwhile came in from the *Llangibby Castle* in eight LCP's, waited for clear access to the landing site, and beached on Y GREEN at 0138. By 0340, the transports had moved into position about 2,000 yards offshore and dropped anchor. As early as 0500, the unit's command post on the *Glengyle* reported that 2,670 men and 33

[16] (1) Msgs, CCB to CO 13th Armd Regt, 1135, 8 Nov 42, and CO 13th Armd Regt to 1st Bn 13th Armd Regt, 1204, 8 Nov 42, in 13th Armd Regt Opns Jnl, Beach Landing at Oran. (2) Intervs with Gen Robinett, 7 Mar 49, 24 Jun 49, and 11 Jan 51, and with Maj Gen Lunsford E. Oliver (Ret.), 11 Jan 51. (3) Lt. Col. Bogardus S. Cairns, "Employment of Armor in the Invasion of Oran," *Military Review,* XXVIII, No. 6 (September, 1948), pp. 46–56.

[17] (1) Combat Team 26 included 5,262 officers, warrant officers, and enlisted men, the larger elements being the 26th Infantry Regiment, the 33d Field Artillery Battalion, Batteries C and D of the 105th Coast Artillery (AA), and the 2d Battalion of the 531st Engineer Shore Regiment. CT 26 AAR, 21 Nov 42. (2) The report of the Senior Naval Officer Landings, Y Beach, sets the figures at 5,578 men with 395 vehicles. Rpt in App. II to Incl 1 of NCXF, TORCH Despatch.



Y BEACHES, LES ANDALOUSES

motor vehicles had landed.[18] An attempt by the French warship *La Surprise* to interfere with these landings was prevented by H.M.S. *Brilliant,* which sank her at 0715, after an engagement of more than a half hour.

Y (or "Yorker") Beach, on the southwestern part of a wide bay, and near a high sheltering promontory and the small village of Les Andalouses, was almost midway between Mersa bou Zedjar and Oran. Extending about ten miles to the northeast and east from the beach was the Plaine des Andalouses, a level cultivated area between the coast and the precipitous slopes of a great hill mass. Four villages bordered the plain. El Ancor at the southwest and Bou Sfer in the south central position nestled close to the base of the hills. Les Andalouses at the west and Aïn et Turk at the northeast were each in part a seaside resort for Europeans. The beach near Aïn et Turk had been used at least twice by invaders bent on the conquest of Oran, including Spanish reconquest in 1732, but this time it was to be taken from the rear. The principal roads accessible from Y Beach linked Les Andalouses with Bou Tlélis, just north of the Sebkra d'Oran, and via a road junction at Bou Sfer with Aïn et Turk and Mers el Kébir. From the latter, at a fork near the western end of the valley between Djebel Santon and Djebel Murdjadjo, a road branched to Oran over the northern slopes of Djebel Murdjadjo and the heights west of the city. Thus the area, somewhat like that adjacent to Mersa bou Zedjar, was a natural pocket hemmed in by high hills within which an attacking force was vulnerable to energetic counterattack. On the Plaine des Andalouses, such a force was subject to ready observation and in the last phase of its fifteen-mile advance

[18] (1) Msg, CT 26 to CG CTF, 8 Nov 32, Entry 68 in CTF C-3 Jnl. (2) Rpt of SNOL (Y), 13 Nov 42, in App. II to Incl 1 of NCXF, TORCH Despatch.



Y WHITE BEACH, LES ANDALOUSES. *Landing craft at left is an LCM.*

to Oran, might well come under cross fire from Djebel Santon and Djebel Murdjadjo.

The 2d Battalion, 26th Combat Team, reinforced, landed on the west (Y GREEN) and the 3d Battalion, reinforced, in the center (Y WHITE), in the assault. The 1st Battalion remained in reserve at the beachhead until committed next day. Rifle squads from each assault battalion were left to guard the flanks of the beachhead while the other units proceeded inland. Company G, with an antitank platoon attached, took the village of El Ancor and established a system of defenses astride the road leading from it to the southwest. When three French armored cars approached from the direction of Bou Tlélis at about 0800, they were destroyed by accurate 37-mm. antitank and 60-mm. mortar fire. The main body of the 2d Battalion pressed eastward with the mission of clearing the area of Cap Falcon–Aïn et Turk–Bouisseville. The 3d Battalion left a detachment to occupy Bou Sfer, east of which Battery B, 33d Field Artillery Battalion, set up its 75-mm. pack howitzers, and continued along the road toward its objective, Ferme Combier, some five miles farther to the east. Just before reaching it the unit was pinned down shortly after 0740 by artillery fire from Djebel Santon and close-by Ferme Ste. Marie and by small arms and automatic fire from Djebel Murdjadjo. There it remained for the rest of D Day until it could be reinforced.[19]

The waters off Y Beach were within range of the coastal guns of the Fort du Santon. At daylight intermittent shelling of the transport area began. Shortly before 0900, the transports there came under more accurate fire, and at 0917, the *Llangibby Castle* received the first of several damaging hits which obliged her to move farther west and out of range. Most of the personnel of Combat Team 26 had already gone ashore,

[19] CT 26 AAR, 21 Nov 42.

but motor vehicles, guns of the 33d Field Artillery Battalion, ammunition, and supplies remained to be landed. The Service Company was ferried from the *Llangibby Castle* about 0930 and, after reassembling from somewhat dispersed landings, reorganized and set about clearing the beach itself of supplies.[20] The battery at Fort du Santon resumed firing at 1050 and drove the *Monarch of Bermuda* out of range after one hit. From time to time bombardment from H.M.S. *Rodney* silenced it temporarily, but could not knock it out.

The Direct Assault on Oran Harbor (Operation RESERVIST)

On H.M.S. *Largs*, reports from the landings on X and Y Beaches, and from those on Z Beaches to be described below, confirmed the Center Task Force commanders, ground and naval, in the belief that surprise had been achieved and that resistance was insignificant. The small cutters, H.M.S. *Hartland* and H.M.S. *Walney*,[21] and two attendant motor launches were waiting off Oran for orders to enter the harbor with their special force to execute Operation RESERVIST. The bulk of this force, 17 officers and 376 enlisted men, had been drawn from the 6th Armored Infantry, 1st Armored Division, and were under Lt. Col. George F. Marshall, commanding officer of its 3d Battalion. They had been brought to Gibraltar on H.M.S. *Leinster* on 5 November and remained aboard her in the harbor until transferred late the next day to the cutters. With the soldiers in the special force were 4 officers and 22 seamen of the U.S. Navy,[22] 6 U.S. Marines and 52 Royal Navy officers and ratings, as well as the ships' crews. About noon on 7 November, the operation for which they had trained in a Northern Ireland harbor was explained to them. It was, they then realized, a "suicide mission."

In charge of the operation and mainly responsible for its planning was Capt. Frederic T. Peters, RN, a retired officer who had volunteered for this undertaking. He rode in the *Walney*, which was itself commanded by Lt. Comdr. P. C. Meyrick (RN). In charge of the *Hartland* was Lt. Comdr. G. P. Billot (RNR). Canoes were carried on the *Walney* for use by special teams in boarding ships to prevent their being scuttled in the harbor entrance or alongside the wharves. Captain Peters even contemplated seizing the fortified batteries above the harbor, and perhaps receiving the surrender of the city itself.[23]

Although an operation to gain and hold Oran harbor invited approval, for success it had to begin either before H Hour with full surprise or much later when the French

[20] (1) Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch," p. 39. (2) CT 26 AAR, 21 Nov 42. (3) Rpt of SNOL (Y), 13 Nov 42, in App. II to Incl 1 of NCXF TORCH Despatch.

[21] Formerly U.S. Coast Guard vessels transferred to the British more than a year earlier.

[22] Numerical strength of the RESERVIST Force from: (1) Memo, Maj Gen Orlando Ward for CinC AF, 12 Dec 42, and Gen L. E. Oliver for TAG, 19 Nov 42, sub: Authorization of spec fourragère and battle streamer. Both in AFHQ AG 330.13 Micro Job 24 Reel 78D. (2) 6th Armd Inf AAR, 2 Sep 43. (3) Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations*, II, 225. (4) The U.S. Navy participants are listed by name in Report of Commander U.S. Naval Bases, Oran Area, which is Incl 6 of NCXF, TORCH Despatch.

[23] (1) Interv with Harold Leo Disher, 21 Feb 49. Mr. Disher, a war correspondent, made the journey with the RESERVIST Force from the Clyde to Oran, and was on the bridge of the *Walney* during this operation. (2) See also John A. Parris, Jr., *et al.*, *Springboard to Berlin* (New York, 1943), pp. 93–125, which contains an extensive account by Mr. Disher written soon after the operation. (3) Rpt of Lt Comdr Dickey, USNR, in Incl 6 of NCXF, TORCH Despatch.

naval authorities were almost unable to resist and about to destroy what they could no longer defend. Operation RESERVIST was instead allowed to begin at 0245, 8 November, just after the French had been aroused by a general alarm which gave them time to man their defenses, and at a time when they could hardly regard their defeat as imminent. A French naval force controlled the port and was expected to resist the Allies with all the means at its disposal. Thus the forebodings of the special force were justified.

The *Walney* approached the harbor in the shadow of the cliffs rising from the eastern edge of the bay. The *Hartland* followed at a five minutes' interval. The sound of sirens in the city could be heard, and all city lights were blacked out while the ships were still a good distance from shore. The harbor extends eastward along the southern limit of the bay from the base of steep hills. It is enclosed on its northern edge by a breakwater 3,000 yards long and across the eastern end by a smaller jetty extending from the Môle du Ravin Blanc with an opening about 200 yards wide. Access to the port through this aperture was blocked by a floating boom past which the *Walney* planned to force its way. Fixed fortified batteries commanded the entrance, the harbor itself, and all adjacent waters, while dual-purpose artillery, machine guns, and the naval guns of warships in the northwestern corner of the long narrow harbor could be brought to bear on intruders. Toward this potential Vesuvius the *Walney* and the *Hartland* bent their course, a few minutes before 0300, 8 November.

As the first ship neared the entrance, and one of the motor launches sped forward to lay a smoke screen, a searchlight's beam shot out over the bay. Tracer bullets sprayed out considerably ahead of the *Walney*'s bow. Then the beam found the vessel, and artillery fire came her way at once. A large American flag at her stern, and the reiterated assertion over a loud speaker on the *Walney* that the approaching force was friendly, made no impression. A shell soon jarred the ship, throwing men to the deck. Captain Peters had her turned to the north, saw that the *Hartland* was still following, and circled to try for the harbor entrance at top speed. In thus persisting, he disregarded a somewhat equivocal message received during the approach from headquarters on H.M.S. *Largs,* which reported: "No shooting thus far; landings unopposed"; and instructed the RESERVIST force: "Don't start a fight unless you have to." [24]

On the second approach, shell and machine gun fire ripped into the *Walney* with drastic effect, but she reached the boom, broke it, and slipped inside the harbor. Abruptly then the French fire shifted to the *Hartland* while the leading vessel slid slowly toward the western end of the port in complete darkness and sudden, extraordinary silence. Three canoes and their crews were launched over the side. Not long after the *Walney* had passed between the Môle du Ravin Blanc and a floating drydock moored near the northern breakwater, a French destroyer was observed approaching head on from the west. An attempt was made to ram it. The effort failed, and as the two ships scraped past each other, the destroyer's guns raked the *Walney's* decks, causing many casualties. The intrepid survivors continued westward beyond the Môle Millerand and then encountered a devastating barrage from both sides and from dead ahead, of an intensity compared with which

[24] Msg, NC CTF to *Walney,* 0250, 8 Nov 42, Entry 17, in CTF G–3, Jnl.

the preliminary fire had been merely an introduction. Fires blazed up. Ammunition became ignited. The ship's guns went out of action. All but one of the officers on the bridge were killed and he was wounded. The courageous troops and their commander, Colonel Marshall, kept up small arms fire, some until they fell and others until they eventually received orders, shouted from man to man, to abandon ship. The *Walney* was left a semisubmerged wreck not far from the sunken French warships at the western end of the harbor.

The *Hartland* also persisted in the attack and was caught by heavy fire just short of the smoke screen at the harbor mouth. Most of her gun crews and many of the troops crouching below decks were wounded or killed during this approach. Commander Billot was temporarily blinded by a shell splinter. The ship failed to find the entrance and struck the jetty south of it. The wounded commander had the vessel backed off and again sent forward despite the blows already sustained and the certain prospect of more ahead. This time the *Hartland* succeeded in the effort to enter the port. As she swung round the end of the Môle du Ravin Blanc to reach a debarkation point near its base, her course took her past the French destroyer *Typhon* at its moorings beside the mole. Pointblank fire tore through the thin unarmored hull, exploded inside, set the ship blazing at several points, and put her wholly out of control. As she drifted, in danger of exploding, Commander Billot ordered that she be abandoned. One hour after the *Hartland* had come under fire outside the harbor, all survivors left the doomed and blazing vessel in two motor launches which then withdrew seaward.

Ruthless resistance had completely frustrated the daring venture. Of the 17 officers and 376 enlisted men of the 6th Armored Infantry, 9 officers and 180 enlisted men were killed or presumed dead while 5 officers and 152 enlisted men were wounded. Only 3 officers and 44 enlisted men landed unhurt.[25] U.S. Navy casualties were 5 killed and 7 wounded; Royal Navy losses, 113 killed and 86 wounded.[26] All survivors were held first as civil, then military, prisoners while the battle for Oran proceeded, its ultimate outcome almost unaffected by this bloody episode.

Naval Air Support for the Landings

At first light, eight Albacore dive bombers from H.M.S. *Furious* and six Hurricane fighter escorts from each of the two auxiliary carriers took off, formed up at 5,000 feet above H.M.S. *Furious*, started inland at approximately 0600, and climbed to 8,000 feet.[27] They crossed the coast between X Beach and Y Beach, continued to a point east of Lourmel, and followed the northern edge of the Sebkra d'Oran to Valmy. Dropping propaganda leaflets there, they swung back over La Sénia airfield in broad daylight to be greeted by strong antiaircraft fire and enemy fighters. Each Albacore carried six 250-pound general-purpose bombs with which it accurately struck and wrecked the empty hangars on the northwestern side of

[25] (1) Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch," pp. 37–39. (2) See above, n. 22.

[26] (1) Rpt of Lt Comdr Dickey, USNR, in Incl 6 of NCXF, TORCH Despatch. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[27] Air operations from these vessels are recorded in Incl IV (*Furious' Reports*), Incl V (*Biter's* Report), and Incl VI (*Dasher's* Report), in App. X to Incl 1 of NCXF, TORCH Despatch. A liaison team of two U.S. Army officers (Lt. Col. S. C. Sloane and Maj. John T. Honeycutt) and two radio operators had gone aboard the *Furious* at Gibraltar.

the airdrome, inflicting destruction which was later to be regretted. In the ensuing dogfights, five Dewoitine 520 French fighters were claimed shot down and others damaged. A second attack on La Sénia airfield and a strike at Tafaraoui airfield were delivered a few minutes later by ten Seafires from H.M.S. *Furious* in low-level strafing runs against grounded planes and antiaircraft batteries. Again French fighters contested the action unsuccessfully. In these two missions, three British planes were outright losses while others of each type were forced down at various points ashore as their fuel ran out, sometimes after failing quickly to find their mother ships.

Other aircraft took off from the carriers to patrol and reconnoiter between the two airdromes and Z Beaches as the troops assembled for their inland advances, or to investigate the highways as far as Sidi Bel Abbès and Mascara for signs of French military movement from the interior toward Oran. Such French aircraft as were in operation near Oran confined their resistance to the defense of the airdrome and left the landings at the beaches almost undisturbed.

The Landings Along the Golfe d'Arzew

Much the greater proportion of the Center Task Force was scheduled to land along the Golfe d'Arzew, either in the vicinity of the town of Arzew or over the Z beaches extending eastward from it. Naval units in this part of the convoy from Gibraltar, not including the vessels destined for Operation RESERVIST, totaled thirty-four transports and more than twenty escorting warships. They reached the beacon submarine, five and one-half miles from Cap Carbon, beginning at 2130 as the plans prescribed, and turned into the Golfe d'Arzew. Although the night was dark the beacon light at Arzew was clearly visible.[28]

The landing force troops were organized as follows: Combat Teams 16 and 18 and a Ranger force in two sections, attached to the 1st Infantry Division, all three under command of Maj. Gen. Terry Allen, and Task Force RED of Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, commanded by General Oliver.[29] The Senior Naval Officer Landings, Z Beaches, for these eastern landings was Capt. C. D. Graham (RN) with headquarters on H.M.S. *Reina del Pacifico*. His first step was to get the Rangers ashore in the vicinity of Arzew.

The Ranger force had four objectives. The chief mission was to capture two coastal batteries, one of which was emplaced in the Fort du Nord above Arzew port on the high ground to the north, and the other in Fort de la Pointe at the base of the hill at the northeast corner of the harbor. They were also to seize part of the town of Arzew adjacent to its port, and the heights directly above Arzew. To gain these objectives, the 1st Ranger Battalion (Lt. Col. William O. Darby) split into two detachments. The first, consisting of two companies, went in small boats from the *Royal Scotsman* to the protective eastern barrier of the harbor; they scrambled onto the quay, overpowered two

[28] Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch," pp. 36–37, and App. A–7.

[29] "For purpose of coordination and control," the Commanding General, 1st Infantry Division, initially commanded all units landing at Z Beach; for all other purposes, the Commanding General, Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, retained complete responsibility for the tactical employment of his command. The Commanding General, 1st Infantry Division, was responsible for expediting as rapidly as possible the landing of the armored force and retained no control over its elements once they had passed through the beachhead. CTF FO 1, 4 Oct 42, Annex 16.

sentries in a brief exchange of gunfire, and caught the garrison asleep. Soon they held Fort de la Pointe and the northern side of Arzew. Colonel Darby led four companies from the *Royal Ulsterman* and *Ulster Monarch* up the cliffs from a landing point southeast of Cap Carbon and, after proceeding for about one mile, worked up a ravine to the rear of the main battery of four 105-mm. guns at the Fort du Nord. Heavy mortars were set up. Three companies approached the barbed wire barrier, and when the scouts attempting to cut it drew fire the Rangers deployed during a mortar barrage and then rushed the battery enclosure. The guns were captured and prepared for demolition in case of a counterattack; the position was organized for defense; and a green signal flare at 0400 made known to watchers that the battery was neutralized.[30] Contact was established between the two Ranger sections at about the same hour.

The port was to be controlled and operated at the earliest practicable time by an advanced U.S. naval base unit. Parties of U.S. and Royal Navy personnel, with a few U.S. Marines, filled a landing craft from H.M.S. *Royal Ulsterman* and went to the port entrance, waited several minutes for the Rangers' signal that their mission at Fort de la Pointe had been successful, and at about 0200 passed through the unobstructed opening. They continued to the inner harbor and, in the darkness, while the Rangers could be heard taking Fort de la Pointe, boarded and seized control of four small vessels moored there.[31] Until daylight, resistance in Arzew was negligible.[32] When snipers, machine guns, and one small field piece opened fire from the perimeter of the port and the high ground west of the harbor, troops already ashore quickly silenced them. Back in the hills, however, a 75-mm. gun harassed the landings on Z Beach by spasmodically shelling the ships offshore after they had moved in about 0630 to anchor. Protective smoke was used to shield the ships from the enemy gunners.[33]

The three sectors of Z Beach extended more than three miles from a point somewhat southeast of Arzew to an eastern limit beyond the village of St. Leu. The approaches were generally good, the grades easy and the yellow sand fairly firm, but the exits were limited to breaks in a low, rocky cliff. The two main hazards were exposure to wind and surf and vulnerability to artillery fire from the heights above Arzew. As a result of minor derangements during the initial debarkation and the five-mile approach in formation by landing craft, all assault waves could not touch down at the three appointed sectors of Z Beach on schedule. Combat Team 18 began landing on the western sector, Z GREEN, at 0120; Combat

[30] (1) Lt. James J. Altieri, *Darby's Rangers* (Durham, N. C., 1945), pp. 32–35. (2) Maj Weldon E. Laiche, The Oran Operation, 8 November 1942, MS. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga., 1948–49.

[31] Rpt of Capt Ansel, USN, Port of Arzeu [Arzew], 30 Nov 42, in Incl 6 of NCXF, TORCH Despatch. Capt. Walter Ansel was in command of the Navy party. Comdr. H. Archdale (RN) commanded the British component.

[32] The assault force was aided by a Foreign Legionnaire, Capt. Edgar Guerard Hamilton, an American whose duty at Fort de la Pointe had almost ended, but who was still there when the attack began, and was known to be a likely source of help. He is said to have identified himself to captors by discovering among them a fellow townsman from a small New England community. TORCH Anthology, Vol. I, Ch. 9, p. 9. CIA OSS Archives.

[33] (1) Msg, SNOL (Z) to *Largs*, 0605, 8 Nov 42, Entry 83, in CTF G–3 Jnl. (2) Capt Ansel's Rpt cited in n. 31.



TROOPS AND EQUIPMENT COMING ASHORE, Z WHITE BEACH *near St. Leu.*

Team 16, in the center sector, Z WHITE, at 0100; and Z RED on the east, to be used by Task Force RED, Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, was reported ready to receive the armored force about 0330.[34]

Combat Team 18 on D Day

The 18th Combat Team (Col. Frank U. Greer)—7,092 strong—landed on Z Beach GREEN from H.M.S. *Ettrick,* the *Tegelberg* (Dutch), and H.M.S. *Reina del Pacifico,* beginning at 0120.[35] The landing craft formation, though led in by motor launch, contained some stragglers which kept arriving at scattered points for more than ten minutes, a process which made reorganization more difficult than had been expected.[36] The 3d Battalion was sent to Arzew to occupy the town and relieve the Ranger detachment. The 1st Battalion was sent directly inland to seize St. Cloud and the high ground of Djebel Khar, west of it. From 0730 to 0840, the 2d Battalion of the 18th Infantry, the 32d Field Artillery Battalion with two of its guns, and the antitank company came ashore.[37]

The 3d Battalion first met resistance about 0400 near the Arzew barracks and

[34] Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch," p. 37. (2) 1st Div AAR, 12 Nov 42.

[35] CT 18 AAR, 19 Nov 42. Strength from Master Landing Schedule, in CTF FO 1, 4 Oct 42, Annex 3D. Including the period of training in ship-to-shore landings and of waiting for final loading, these troops had lived on the ships for more than six weeks.

[36] (1) *Ibid.* (2) Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch," p. 37.

[37] CT 18 AAR, 19 Nov 42.

naval base southwest of the harbor. The barracks was readily seized, with sixty-two prisoners taken, but the naval base on the south jetty required a concentration from 60-mm. mortars before it would capitulate. Thirteen seaplanes, fueled and loaded with torpedoes, were captured ashore intact.[38] By midmorning the entire city had been mopped up and only snipers on the outskirts remained to be cleared.

The 1st Battalion encountered French opposition for the first time about three miles west of Rénan where it was attacked by five armored cars. All were destroyed or immobilized by antitank rifle grenades, and the advance continued as far as the village of St. Cloud, astride the main road about one third of the way from the beach to the edge of Oran. St. Cloud lay in the center of an open agricultural area, its 3,500 inhabitants protected by walls and houses of masonry and concrete. Although a lone American reconnaissance car had passed through the village without incident in the early morning, the small local guard had been roused and reinforced from a barracks along the road toward Oran when the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, approached to seize it.[39] The advance guard was met just before noon by a heavy volume of rifle and machine gun fire from the 16th Tunisian Infantry Regiment, and from a battalion of the Foreign Legion concealed among the houses. The first American attack was quickly repulsed by this fire, augmented by the 75-mm. and 155-mm. shellfire of a battalion of the 68th African Artillery Regiment along a line northwest of the town. The self-propelled 105-mm. assault guns of the Cannon Company, 18th Infantry, were sent up from the beach and with the 2d Battalion, 18th Infantry, reinforced the 1st Battalion in time for a second unsuccessful attack from the south at 1530. Late in the afternoon, the 3d Battalion (less Company K) arrived from Arzew and assembled on the high ground north of St. Cloud preparatory to an attack from that direction. During the night, plans were issued for a concerted attack to open at 0700, 9 November.[40]

Combat Team 16 on D Day

The 16th Combat Team (Col. Henry B. Cheadle), numbering 5,608, landed on Z WHITE and Z RED beginning at 0100. The 3d Battalion on the west advanced against light opposition from isolated farms to the vicinity of Fleurus, a few miles south southwest of St. Cloud. Fleurus was developed as a block to French road communications. The 1st Battalion on the east first took Damesme and St. Leu by surprise and ahead of schedule, and cleared Z RED for the later landing of Task Force RED, Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division. It then moved eastward through Port-aux-Poules and sent a force southeastward to En Nekala, occupying each place with one infantry company. At La Macta, some opposition from elements of the 2d Algerian Infantry Regiment was met. The first Americans to enter were ambushed. A co-ordinated attack by Company B and Headquarters Company, 16th Infantry, with a few guns, and with H.M.S. *Farndale* standing by for naval gunfire support, opened at

[38] (1) *Ibid.* (2) Incl 1 (Rpt of the Naval Commander, Center Task Force) of NCXF, TORCH Despatch.

[39] Interv with Lt Col Frederick W. Gibb (then CO 3d Bn 16th Inf), 13 Nov 50.

[40] CT 18 AAR, 19 Nov 42.



THE "MARACAIBO" H.M.S *MISOA, a converted shallow-draft oiler used as a tank landing ship. At Z Red Beach, light tanks were discharged through doors in the bow over bridge sections to the shore.*

1230.[41] An hour later they had captured La Macta, and by 1400 a defense line east of the village, beyond the highway and railroad bridges over the La Macta river, barred the French reinforcements which were expected to be sent toward Oran from Mostaganem and Perrégaux. Company A, 16th Infantry, was placed on the southwest flank. The 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, after coming ashore on the initiative of its commander at 1000, was released from corps reserve and sent toward Fleurus on the southern flank of the division.[42]

Task Force RED Takes Tafaraoui Airfield

The armored task force of 4,772 men, under command of General Oliver, which had the mission of capturing Tafaraoui and La Sénia airdromes, was brought to Z Beach and Arzew on the transports *Durban Castle* and *Derbyshire* and the Maracaibos *Misoa* and *Tasajera.* After Z RED Beach had been reported cleared, the Maracaibos beached a little before and a little after 0400, put out their ponton bridges, and began unload-

[41] (1) Msg, *Jamaica* to NC CTF, 1229, 8 Nov 42, Entry 213, in CTF G–3 Jnl. (2) Interv with Lt Col William A. Cunningham, III (then CO 1st Bn 16th Inf), 1 Aug 49. (3) Strength of Combat Team 16 from Master Landing List, Annex 3D to CTF FO 1, 4 Oct 42.

[42] (1) CT 16 AAR, 21–24 Nov 42. (2) Spec Periodic Rpt, 0200, 9 Nov 42; Msg, SNOL (Z) to Senior Officer CTF, 0100, 8 Nov 42 (msg cited but not filed); Msg, *Farndale* to NC CTF, 1610, 8 Nov 42, Entry 281. All in CTF G–3 Jnl. (3) Capt S. V. Ralph, The Operations of the 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, in the Invasion of North Africa, 8 November–11 November 1942, MS. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga., 1947–48. This manuscript relates the personal experience of a battalion adjutant.

ing at 0600. They were fully unloaded at 0759 despite fire from a battery near St. Leu.[43] Combat Command B's plans for Task Force RED were in outline much like those for the smaller Task Force GREEN, described earlier in this chapter. The shore party on Z RED Beach consisted of the 2d Battalion, 591st Boat Regiment, less Company F (at Mersa bou Zedjar). A reconnaissance force consisting of the Reconnaissance Company (less one platoon in Task Force GREEN), 13th Armored Regiment, was expected to land first from the Maracaibos, to assemble near the beach, and at H plus 3½ hours to move inland expeditiously to the village of Ste. Barbe-du-Tlélat, a distance of about twenty miles to the southwest. That small village was the hub of a network of main and secondary roads along which the reconnaissance force [Reconnaissance Company, 13th Armored Regiment (−)] could disperse to reconnoiter the areas near Sidi bel Abbès, Oggaz, St. Denis-du-Sig, Perrégaux, Tafaraoui, and Mascara, and toward La Sénia to establish contact with Task Force GREEN. A flying column (Lt. Col. John K. Waters) consisting of the 1st Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment (less Company C), Company E, 6th Armored Infantry, one heavy platoon of Company B, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, one platoon of the 16th Armored Engineer Battalion and a reconnaissance section, attached, was to assemble near St. Leu and advance swiftly along the same road to Tafaraoui airfield via Ste. Barbe-du-Tlélat. If the Paratroop Task Force were found already in control, Colonel Waters was authorized to transfer to its commander the responsibility for protecting the airfield and to continue on further missions, including that of covering the assembly near Tafaraoui of the main body of Task Force RED and preparing for an advance on the La Sénia airport and, after that, on Oran. The parachute force was to be attached to Colonel Waters' command during joint operations should they be required to seize and hold Tafaraoui airfield. The main body of Task Force RED would assemble at St. Leu, where General Oliver's command post was to be established. In addition to some vehicles from the Maracaibos, the main body would include others from the *Derbyshire* and *Durban Castle* and light tanks of Company C, 1st Armored Regiment, which were to be unloaded at the Arzew docks. It would include Company B, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion (less the heavy platoon with the flying column) and all but one battery of the 106th Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion, which was to furnish antiaircraft protection both on Z RED Beach and at Tafaraoui airfield.[44]

[43] (1) Msg, CT 18 to CT 18 rear (intercept), 0704, 8 Nov 42, Entry 90, in CTF G–3 Jnl. (2) Task Force RED, Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, contained: Headquarters, Combat Command B; Reconnaissance Company (less a platoon), Maintenance Company (less a detachment), Service Company (less a detachment), a detachment of Headquarters Company, and the 2d Battalion—all of the 13th Armored Regiment; the 1st Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment; the 2d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry (+); the 27th Field Artillery Battalion (less Battery C); Company B, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion (+); Company B, 16th Armored Engineer Battalion (−); a detachment of Company E, 16th Armored Engineer Battalion; the 106th Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion (less Battery D); Company B, 47th Medical Battalion; the 2d Battalion, 591st Engineer Boat Regiment (less Company F); Company B, 1st Armored Support Battalion (−); and a detachment of the 141st Armored Signal Company.

[44] (1) CCB 1st Armd Div FO 1, 11 Oct 42. (2) TF RED CCB 1st Armd Div FO 1 with Intell Annex, 11 Oct 42.



FRENCH PRISONERS *captured by men of Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, are guarded by MP's on the beach near St. Leu, 8 November 1942.*

The reconnaissance force moved out at 0820, followed some fifteen minutes later by the light flying column.[45] Headquarters, Combat Command B, was set up in a police station in St. Leu while Colonel Waters' force hastened through Ste. Barbe-du-Tlélat to Tafaraoui airfield, north of the village and more than twenty-five miles inland. Brushing aside all resistance, it arrived at the airdrome at 1112, and deployed for the attack. The airborne troops had not yet arrived. Roads north and northeast of the airdrome were blocked to prevent escapes as Company A, 1st Armored Regiment, attacked from the south and Company B, 1st Armored Regiment, with the 1st Platoon of Company E, 6th Armored Infantry, attacked from the east. A vigorous assault by the tanks quickly took the airfield, with some 300 prisoners, while an ammunition train approaching from Oran was seized as it neared the field. It was now possible to order Task Force GREEN to approach La Sénia by the more direct route north of the Sebkra d'Oran. At 1215, Tafaraoui airfield was declared ready to receive Allied planes from Gibraltar. La Sénia airfield, on the other hand, had not yet been captured, and the French there sent bombers the few miles to Tafaraoui to counterattack. Carrier planes, with the loss of one, knocked down four French aircraft. When the first two squadrons of Twelfth Air Force Spitfires from Gibraltar were landed at 1630 at Tafaraoui, four French planes, which had been mistaken for an expected carrier plane escort, jumped them and killed one Ameri-

[45] (1) TF RED 1st Armd Div AAR, 12 Nov 42. (2) 1st Bn 1st Armd Regt, 31 Dec 42. (3) 2d Bn 6th Armd Inf Hist, 11 Oct 42–12 May 43. (4) Msg, 8 Nov 42, Entry 149, in CTF G–3 Jnl.

can pilot before they were themselves destroyed or driven off.[46]

The armored advance by Colonel Waters' force from Tafaraoui airfield against La Sénia airdrome was deterred by French air attacks, by enemy batteries, and by the threat of counterattacks from the south. During the night, as part of the main body of Task Force RED reinforced the flying column, a section prepared to start for La Sénia at 0600, 9 November.[47]

The Airborne Troops of the Center Task Force

Back in England, late on 7 November, as the men of the Paratroop Task Force (Col. William C. Bentley, Jr.) stood by the transport planes at St. Eval and Predanneck in Cornwall on five-minute alert, word arrived that the "Peace" Plan would be used.[48] The take-off would be set back. The planes did not assemble over the southwest tip of England, therefore, until 2200. Rain, fog, faulty radio intercommunication, and defective running lights interfered with the maintenance of formation. When the airplanes climbed through clouds to 10,000 feet above sea level to surmount the crests of Spain's northern mountains, they became completely dispersed. The beacon signal from the ship off Oran, being sent on a frequency other than that expected by the transport planes, was never received. The widely separated aircraft, unaware that the "War" Plan had been reinstated while they were in flight, were heading toward a hostile reception.[49]

Six of the air transports wandered far to the west of Oran. One landed at Gibraltar; two in French Morocco; and three in Spanish Morocco. The parachutists of a seventh C–47 were dropped while over another point in Spanish Morocco. Sixty-one paratroopers were interned by the Spanish Government. Of the thirty-two planes which arrived over Algeria about 0600 at various points along the coast, all were low in fuel. The troops were exhausted by the long, cramped flight. Southeast of Lourmel, near Source Blanche, a group of twelve planes on Colonel Bentley's order dropped their passengers by parachute. Before long they were trudging toward Tafaraoui, which they reached the next day.[50] One of the C–47's continued over Tafaraoui airfield only to receive antiaircraft fire and to turn off while sending warning by radio that the "War" Plan was in effect after all. All but four of the C–47's then landed at the western end of the Sebkra d'Oran, beginning at

[46] The two squadrons were from the 31st Fighter Group commanded by Col. John R. Hawkins. They had been the first such unit to reach the United Kingdom, had been part of the Allied air cover for the Dieppe raid on 19 August 1942, and were in aircraft which had been assembled at the Gibraltar airdrome. The 52d Fighter Group (Col. Richard Allison) was ready for the mission but unable to take off until after Hawkins' unit cleared the airstrip.

[47] (1) 1st Bn 1st Armd Regt AAR, 31 Dec 42. (2) TF RED 1st Armd Div AAR, 12 Nov 42. (3) Co B 701st TD Bn AAR, 27 Sep 42–12 Feb 43, 24 Sep 43.

[48] Instead of parachute drops, aircraft would land troops.

[49] A warning that General Boissau in Oran had been apprised of the imminent Allied arrival, that the fifth column plans had broken down, and that a state of full alert existed was reported by Office of Strategic Services radio from Oran to Colonel Eddy on 7 November 1942. OSS Rpt, TORCH and the SOE Signal Stations at Gibraltar, p. 5. CIA OSS Archives. General Eisenhower transmitted this report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff in a message (Review 2) sent at 0232, 8 November 1942.

[50] They were reported by Headquarters, Combat Command B, at 1340 to be at Source Blanche and Oggaz. Msgs, 8 Nov 42, Entries 230 and 233, in CTF G–3 Jnl.

about 0830, and there established a defensive position, reinforced later by a platoon of light tanks. Meanwhile Colonel Bentley, after his plane had dropped the paratroopers, continued over Tafaraoui and La Sénia, where he observed evidence of hostile forces. He was then forced to land on a salt flat south of Oran before he could rejoin the others. Two other transports settled down near his, one still loaded with troops. All these Americans were captured and imprisoned by French civilian police. Thus the morning passed with the paratroopers scattered and ineffective.

By afternoon of D Day, with Tafaraoui airdrome in Allied hands, Col. Edson D. Raff attempted to have the flyable C–47's at the western end of the Sebkra d'Oran assembled on the field, but the French continued their resistance. Fighters from La Sénia forced down several of the transports and inflicted casualties on the crews and paratroopers. Artillery in the hills within range of Tafaraoui dropped 75-mm. shells on the airfield for about an hour, damaging some newly arrived C–47's. By nightfall, only fourteen of the transports remained operational.[51] Of the 556 paratroopers, only about 300 could be assembled on 15 November at Maison Blanche airfield, near Algiers, for the next operations.

The Situation as D Day Ends

Commodore Troubridge and General Fredendall on the *Largs* could assess the situation of the Center Task Force twenty-four hours after its arrival off Oran as distinctly promising despite some setbacks and some uncertain prospects. The beach landings had been successful, although the pace had fallen behind expectations. Arzew had been captured intact, and its small port was being used to the full. Repeated weak challenges to the Allied naval blockade off Oran and Mers el Kébir had been repulsed without any interference in the landing operations and with loss of three small French warships. French aviation had offered negligible opposition. Each of the three major beachheads had been established. From the beachhead on the western flank, Task Force GREEN was firmly established in possession of Lourmel airstrip and on its ways to La Sénia airfield, slated for attack at dawn.

Combat Team 26, 1st Infantry Division, under General Roosevelt had crossed the Plaine des Andalouses to occupy the road centers at El Ancor, Bou Sfer, and Aïn et Turk, and was scheduled to attack next the coastal battery on Cap Falcon and to push through Ferme Combier and past Djebel Santon. To the south, Task Force RED had occupied Tafaraoui airdrome and was preparing a detachment to push northwestward to the La Sénia airfield in the early morning. In the beachhead inland from the Golfe d'Arzew, General Allen had advanced to the prescribed division beachhead line, except in the area of St. Cloud, where the French had stopped the 18th Infantry. Already ashore were 10,472 men of the reinforced 1st Infantry Division and 1,026 men of General Oliver's Task Force RED, 1st Armored Division. Corps troops numbering 2,522 had been landed, of which the 1st Battalion, 19th Engineers (Combat), was the one striking force in reserve. Only 340 vehicles belonging to these units had been landed. The increasing roughness of the surf, after damaging scores of landing craft, forced the suspension of all beach landings, before daylight, both along the Golfe d'Ar-

[51] This account appears in the History of the 51st Troop Carrier Wing, pp. 9 ff. It is also reprinted in Wings at War Series 6: The AAF in Northwest Africa, published by AAF, 1945.

zew and at Les Andalouses. The cove near Mersa bou Zedjar remained usable, if considerably hampered by the swell.[52] The direct assault on Oran harbor and the airborne attack on Tafaraoui airdrome had each badly miscarried, although the extent of the losses remained unknown at Center Task Force headquarters.

[52] Msg, Principal Mil Landing Officer (Z) to CG CTF, 0705, 9 Nov 42, Entry 377, in CTF G–3 Jnl.

CHAPTER XII

The Seizure of Oran

The second day's operations promised to be more difficult. Resistance such as that encountered by Combat Team 18 at St. Cloud and Combat Team 26 at Ferme Combier could be expected at other points selected by the French defenders. French opposition was likely to stiffen with a view to delaying the attack until reinforcements from the interior could intervene. Enemy counterattacks were a possibility, and the roads, particularly that from the Foreign Legion's center at Sidi bel Abbès, were being closely watched for the approach of French columns. American ground units were widely scattered, with small reserves and restricted mobility, and with less armored and artillery support than would have been the case had unloadings kept to the scheduled volume. On the other hand, American land-based aircraft units were prepared to reinforce the carrier-borne aviation in order to increase the margin of Allied air superiority, and naval gunfire support was ready.[1]

The attack planned for 0400, 9 November, toward Oran had to be suspended until St. Cloud was taken. Late on D Day, General Allen issued orders for the investment of St. Cloud from all sides. Combat Team 16 (less the 1st Battalion) was instructed to bar reinforcement of St. Cloud from the Oran side.[2] The 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, relieved the 3d Battalion in Fleurus, and the 3d Battalion then shifted to high ground west and northwest of St. Cloud, on the road between it and Arcole, where it was to interpose between St. Cloud and an army barracks as best it could without supporting artillery. The 18th Infantry, reinforced by two batteries of the 32d Field Artillery and by elements of the 16th Infantry, was to attack St. Cloud, after an artillery preparation of fifteen minutes, from the north, east, and south. Support by Twelfth Air Force Spitfires was at first ordered then canceled until the planned drive on Oran.[3] Task Force RED could furnish no armored support in view of the missions to which it was already committed and the incompleteness of its unloading.[4]

The French Counterattack on the Eastern Flank

The French counterattacks expected on D plus 1 seemed before daylight to be impending at Y Beach,[5] and later were reported at the eastern flank of Z beachhead and near Tafaraoui airfield.[6] The enemy was reported

[1] Msgs, NC CTF to Comdrs of *Aurora, Rodney, Jamaica,* and *Farndale,* 1445, 8 Nov 42, Entry 335, in CTF G–3 Jnl.

[2] 1st Div (Tourville) FO 2, 2115, 8 Nov 42.

[3] Msgs, CG CTF to Col Norstad (Tafaraoui), 0015 and 0318, 9 Nov 42, in CTF G–3 Jnl.

[4] Msgs, CG 1st Div to CG CTF, 2010, 8 Nov 42, and reply, 2217, 8 Nov 42, Entries 350 and 326, in *ibid.*

[5] Msg, CG CTF to CO CT 26, 0540, 9 Nov 42, Entry 367, in *ibid.*

[6] Msgs, CG CTF to CO 531 Engr Shore Regt, 0945 and 0958, 9 Nov 42, Entries 399 and 406, in *ibid.*

to have infiltrated along Djebel Murdjadjo south of El Ancor for a drive northward toward the beachhead of Combat Team 26. At the easternmost wing of the Center Task Force, reinforcements from the 2d Algerian Infantry Regiment at Mostaganem were believed to have strengthened the troops that had been driven out by the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, as it occupied La Macta on D-Day afternoon. At daylight, moreover, air reconnaissance revealed that light armored and motorized forces were advancing in column from Sidi bel Addès toward Tafaraoui.[7] Planes strafed and bombed these elements and thereafter watched the highway for the main column of which, presumably, they were the advance elements.

The threat which developed on the eastern flank near La Macta was disturbing to the whole plan of operations on D plus 1. About one battalion of the enemy infantry forded the La Macta river south of the highway bridge, crossed a swamp during the night, and got into the rear of 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry. They approached from the same direction that a reinforcing company of the 1st Ranger Battalion had been expected, and they attacked northeastward toward the coast.[8] Center Task Force sent a company of the 1st Battalion, 19th Engineers, as reinforcements in response to a first report which had been sent back circuitously and which had become garbled in transmission. The rest of the engineer regiment was alerted for possible movement.[9] Before they could arrive, naval bombardment was also requested by the naval gunfire officer with the force at La Macta who described the situation as "horrible." With the troops entirely surrounded, he expected a "big attack" shortly after noon by greatly superior forces.[10] The Center Task Force felt compelled to divert forces from other missions to quell this threat to Z Beach.

Signal communications with La Macta were almost nil. Reserves were insufficient, and lacked transport. By voice radio General Rooks directed the Commanding General, Combat Command B, at St. Leu to send to La Macta whatever armored reinforcements could be found, even by recalling a column which was en route to Ste. Barbe-du-Tlélat to help Colonel Waters' force oppose a French armored threat from Sidi bel Abbès. Since the column contained two medium tanks, the only mediums ashore, it promised to provide substantial support to the eastern flank of the Center Task Force.[11] Three Albacore dive bombers, escorted by four Seafires, took off from the *Furious* at 1241 to silence French artillery reported in action at a point east of La Macta. They returned at 1441, claiming a successful strike at the designated point, but they had observed no clear evidence that the enemy battery was there.[12] The troops in the mean-

[7] Msg, CG CTF to CG CCB, 0658, 9 Nov 42, Entry 372, in *ibid.*

[8] (1) Msg, Maj Russell F. Akers, Jr., to CG CTF, 1055, 9 Nov 42, Entry 489, in CTF G–3 Jnl. (2) CTF G–2 Periodic Rpts 4 and 5, 9 Nov 42. (3) Msg, *Farndale* to NC CTF, 0934, 9 Nov 42, Entry 409, in CTF G–3 Jnl.

[9] (1) Msgs, CG CTF to CO 531st Engr Regt, 0945 and 0958, 9 Nov 42, and to CO 1st Engr Amph Brig, 1000, 9 Nov 42, Entries 399, 406, and 408, in *ibid.* (2) Interv with Col Cunningham, 1 Aug 49.

[10] Msg, *Farndale* to NC CTF, 1215, 9 Nov 42, Entry 460, in CTF G–3 Jnl.

[11] (1) Msg, CG CTF to CG CCB, 1310, repeated 1325, 9 Nov 42, Entry 469 in *ibid.* (2) Interv with Gen Oliver, 11 Jan 51.

[12] *Furious* Air Log and Rpt, 9 Nov 42; Msg, Aircraft to *Largs,* 1400, 19 Nov 42, Entry 502. CTF G–3 Jnl.

time were encouraged to hold on. "Help coming: tanks, engineers, bombers, Spitfires," they were assured.[13] The cruiser H.M.S. *Jamaica* moved into position during the air attack to join H.M.S. *Farndale* in naval gunfire support when called. The situation ashore was saved by the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, which drove the French troops away by fire and maneuver. The naval bombardment was held in readiness but not required.[14] The first armored reinforcements plus Company D, 6th Armored Infantry, were used in a reconnaissance and demonstration to the east and southeast.

The situation at La Macta cleared up before arrival of the armored column with the medium tanks. The column was accordingly stopped a second time and ordered to resume progress toward Tafaraoui airfield in time to join Task Force RED for the third day's operations. General Oliver's headquarters platoon of light tanks at La Macta was replaced by another platoon which remained near La Macta during the night. The engineer company was placed in the gap between La Macta and En Nekala, the marshland through which the morning attack had been launched.[15] Arrangements were made to relieve the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, after dark with the 1st Battalion, 19th Combat Engineers, from corps reserve and with two batteries of the 7th Field Artillery Battalion. The infantry would thus be freed for operations next morning with the remainder of Combat Team 16 as the attack closed on Oran from the east.[16]

The enemy threat to the beachhead at Les Andalouses which had been reported before dawn turned out to be a minor danger which was readily controlled by General Roosevelt's own forces. The American attack there, somewhat like that at Mehdia–Port-Lyautey during this same morning, was imperiled by a shortage of ammunition and by the suspension of beach landings. At noon, one landing party was brought by determined and skillful navigation through the heavy swell with ammunition already loaded on its own motor transport. Combat Team 26 continued its attack subject to shelling from Cap Falcon and other batteries, and in the face of resistance from about 600 men of the 2d Regiment of Zouaves on the heights west of Mers el Kébir.[17] Combat Team 26 was making very slow progress over terrain advantageous for defense, against heavier shelling than that to which other attacks ashore were being subjected.

French Armored Counterattack Near Tafaraoui

A third French counterattack was launched by an armored force upon elements of Combat Command B in the vicinity of St. Lucien, seven miles east of Tafaraoui airfield. The initial effect of this threat was to stop the northward movement from Tafaraoui by most of the RED flying column which had just started its march to La Sénia. French artillery fire from the hills

[13] Msg, CG CTF to CO 1st Bn 16th Inf, 1347, 9 Nov 42, Entry 477, in *ibid.*

[14] Msg, *Jamaica* to NC CTF, 1353 and 1443, 9 Nov 42, Entries 497 and 486, in *ibid.*

[15] (1) Msg, CG CCB to CG CTF, 1730, 9 Nov 42, Entry 532, in *ibid.* (2) Interv with Col Cunningham, 1 Aug 49, and Gen Oliver, 11 Jan. 51.

[16] (1) Msg, CO 19th Engrs to CG CTF, 1105, 10 Nov 42, Entry 702, in CTF G–3 Jnl. (2) CT 16 AAR, 21 Nov 42.

[17] (1) Msg, 1st Div to CG CTF, 1440, 9 Nov 42, Entry 525, in CTF G–3 Jnl. (2) Interv with Col Alexander N. Stark, Jr. (Ret.), 18 May 51.

west of Tafaraoui had already delayed these troops at a road junction directly north of the airdrome when they received word of the approaching French armored force. One reinforced tank company continued to La Sénia despite the artillery fire, but the remainder turned back to defend the airfield, for protection of the Twelfth Air Force fighter base so recently established at Tafaraoui was essential.[18] Reinforcements consisting of a platoon of light tanks, another of tank destroyers, two medium tanks, an antiaircraft artillery battery, and a convoy of air force ground troops were reported en route at 1015, but the armor was later diverted toward La Macta, as indicated above.[19]

The French armored force assembled in the vicinity of St. Lucien while the Americans organized an attack to drive it off. The reconnaissance platoon of the 1st Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment (Lt. William Beckett, commanding), established contact with the French between Ste. Barbe-du-Tlélat and St. Lucien, while Company B, 1st Armored Regiment (Capt. William R. Tuck, commanding), and a platoon of tank destroyers moved from Tafaraoui airfield early in the afternoon and launched an attack. The tank destroyers laid down a base of fire from a hill about 800 yards from St. Lucien while the tanks advanced with two platoons abreast and a third 500 yards behind them. The French force was driven from the field leaving fourteen ruined E–35 tanks behind. Captain Tuck's force, which had lost one man, one tank, and one half-track, held St. Lucien until relieved that night by Company E, 6th Armored Infantry. Thus French armored intervention had failed to regain Tafaraoui airfield, but by catching the Americans without reserves, had upset the advance on La Sénia airfield and Oran from the south.[20]

La Sénia airfield was not seized until 1000, 9 November, after many airplanes had already flown off, presumably to French Morocco. A few remained dispersed on the ground or in the hangars. Some of the defending troops retired toward Oran. The first American elements to reach the airfield were a few light tanks and self-propelled guns under the command of Colonel Todd, a portion of the flying column of Task Force GREEN. They reached their objective via the highway north of the Sebkra d'Oran and around the French barrier at Misserrhin, arriving on the southern part of the airdrome soon after sunrise. Resistance by the garrison was nominal. The GREEN flying column at first reported taking 60 airplanes and over 300 prisoners, a figure eventually reduced to 159 prisoners with 61 rifles and 4 machine guns, all captured without losses.[21] If the airfield was easily taken, its possession was soon rendered precarious by aggressive artillery bombardment from two batteries of French

[18] Msgs, CCB to CG CTF, 0832 (recorded 0952), 9 Nov 42, and 0932, 9 Nov 42, Entries 403 and 421, in CTF G–3 Jnl.

[19] Msg, CG CCB to CG CTF, 1015, 9 Nov 42, Entry 428, in *ibid.*

[20] (1) Msgs, CG CCB to CG CTF, 1040 and 1110, 9 Nov 42, Entries 437 and 438, in *ibid.* (2) French units from the south converged in the St. Lucien area while another column was approaching from Relizane. Reinforcements were sent as far as Sidi bel Abbès from Oujda, French Morocco, on 9 November. Journal of Actions of the High Command of Moroccan Troops, 8–11 Nov 42. Copy in transl in WTF Final Rpt, Operations TORCH, G–2 Annex, Item 11. DRB AGO. (3) 1st Bn 1st Armd Regt and 2d Bn 6th Armd Inf AAR's. (4) Info from Ltr, Col John K. Waters to author, 29 May 51.

[21] (1) Msg, CG CCB to CG CTF, 0959, 9 Nov 42, Entry 422, in CTF G–3 Jnl. (2) CCB 1st Armd Div S–2 Jnl, 9 Nov 42. (3) Ltr, Lt Col Frank F. Carr to Gen Robinett, 12 Apr 50. Copy in OCMH.

75-mm. guns near Valmy which outranged the tank guns. The party was pinned down, waiting for reinforcements from either Colonel Waters of the RED column or Colonel Robinett's GREEN force. Each of them had his own pressing problems, but Company A, 1st Armored Regiment, with a platoon from Company E, 6th Armored Infantry, the advance section of Task Force RED, arrived by afternoon. When the enemy's 75's at Valmy began shelling the airfield heavily, a detachment of Colonel Todd's force attacked and drove the crews out of their positions. The detachment did not hold the ground but returned to the airfield that night, after destroying three enemy guns. All French planes left in the hangars were destroyed.

Misserrhin Is Bypassed by the GREEN Flying Column 9–10 November

Task Force GREEN approached La Sénia in two sections. While Colonel Todd's advance party was pressing along the highway, Colonel Robinett had, as noted above, strengthened the protection of the western flank and started eastward. His command grew constantly through the addition of detachments and disabled vehicles left behind by Colonel Todd's advance party, and through the arrival of a few elements from the rear. Signal communications by radio with the beachhead and between advancing elements of the Center Task Force were seriously inadequate and remained so until the morning of 10 November. The flying column was not heard from for many hours.[22] On 9 November, the main body of Task Force GREEN expected to reach La Sénia, and if early enough in the day, to turn toward Oran itself.

The defenders of Oran developed one of the principal bastions of their outer ring at Misserrhin, eight miles from Oran and seven miles along a branching road from La Sénia. There the lofty mass of Djebel Murdjadjo loomed high above the narrow strip of level ground adjoining the great salt flats of the Sebkra d'Oran. The sebkra was considered impassable by heavy vehicles. The highway from the west entered a village of stone and concrete structures well adapted to defense. Its other features of strength were supplemented by a battery of 75's emplaced on a bold height and protected by bunkers occupied by machine gunners and riflemen. Some armored cars were also available.

Colonel Todd's depleted flying column had slipped past Misserrhin after nightfall on D Day and had continued early on D+1 along the edge of the sebkra to La Sénia airfield. By the time Colonel Robinett's Headquarters, Task Force GREEN, reinforced, arrived at the Misserrhin bottleneck, the enemy had strengthened the garrison there and was ready for a protracted engagement. Neither a frontal attack down the road by tanks at 1030, supported by artillery fire, nor an arduous attempt at noon to move to the northern flank succeeded. One tank was knocked out on the road, thereafter forming a partial roadblock. Task Force GREEN's lack of infantry hampered its operations severely. At 1615, after more armor and artillery had come up, Colonel Robinett decided that, rather than wait to bring up infantry and resume the fight for the village, he would continue after dark along the sebkra's rim, bringing to Todd's advance force on the airfield the reinforcements, ammunition, and gasoline which he reported to be greatly needed.

[22] Interv with Gen Robinett, 24 June 49.

At dusk, Robinett's column swung to the south and began what proved to be a difficult but successful night march to join Todd on the airfield. The column was soon by error traversing the muddy basin but discovered that it could keep going. Word from the beach was brought by Lt. Bremner (RN), who then took back a series of messages from Colonel Robinett, the most important of which was that all possible reinforcements and in particular Colonel Kern's infantry should use the same route and reach the airfield by daylight. In total darkness, the column reached a point south of its goal, turned north, found a way onto firm ground, and about 0100 joined the small force already there. Task Force GREEN prepared to attack the Valmy area first and then, perhaps in conjunction with Task Force RED from Tafaraoui, to advance against Oran. Early in the morning, when Kern's infantry units arrived, along with a company of tanks and with trucks of gasoline and ammunition, Colonel Robinett had under his command a composite force.[23]

St. Cloud Is Finally Bypassed

The attack on St. Cloud by the 18th Infantry, reinforced, which began about 0700, 9 November, bogged down by noon in the face of persistent and heavy French fire when the troops were only part way through the village.[24] Casualties were considerable. The regiment then planned to pull the infantry back, reorganize it for a converging attack by all three battalions, smash the town with massed artillery preparations for half an hour, and then send the infantry in once more. When General Allen was informed of these plans, he visited the regiment's forward command post, checked the situation with Colonel Greer, and directed that the proposed operation be suspended and that there be no further artillery bombardment of St. Cloud. With General Fredendall's concurrence, he ordered instead that the village be contained with one reinforced battalion; the others were to go westward immediately after nightfall to participate in an attack on Oran. The general situation permitted such an action, while the Allied policy of holding to a minimum all destruction of civilian life and property was much better served by bypassing St. Cloud than by pulverizing it.

The Approach to Oran From the East and South

The situation late on 9 November permitted planning for a final attack on Oran next morning. At General Allen's command post at Rénan, Col. Claude B. Ferenbaugh, operations officer of the Center Task Force, General Allen, General Oliver, and some of their staffs developed such a plan. The counterattacks of the French had all been repelled. In that process, their only available armored force had been overwhelmed. The French had lost all their airfields near Oran. French infantry and artillery were defending organized islands of resistance at St. Cloud, Valmy, and Misserrhin, and might similarly offer resistance on the edge of Oran. American forces for the attack would include five battalions of the 1st Infantry Division from the east, to be supported by most of the 1st Infantry Division's

[23] (1) CCB S–3 and S–2 Jnls, 9–10 Nov 42. (2) Interv with Gen Robinett, 24 Jun 49, and notes in his possession.

[24] Troops defending St. Cloud has been identified as the 16th Tunisian Infantry Regiment, the 1st Battalion of the Foreign Legion, an armored unit, a battalion of 75-mm. guns, and a battery of 155-mm. guns. CTF G–2 Rpt 2, 2400, 8 Nov 42.

artillery, under Brig. Gen. Clift Andrus, and three battalions from the northwest, to be supported by the 33d Field Artillery Battalion, and aided by naval gunfire against the French coastal batteries impeding General Roosevelt's advance. The tanks, tank destroyers, armored infantry, and supporting units of Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, were strung out from Arzew to Tafaraoui airfield, and then to La Sénia airfield and Misserrhin; but General Oliver could hurry Task Force RED toward La Sénia, bypassing Valmy, and might establish contact with Task Force GREEN in time to bring it into the concerted attack after detouring around Misserrhin. From the south, then, one or more armored columns could be sent into the heart of Oran. Written orders were drafted while the preparations began.[25]

The night marches which the 16th and 18th Infantry, reinforced, had to make in order to arrive at the designated sectors of the line of departure had already begun, but they required successful and energetic action by troops who were nearing exhaustion. After weeks on shipboard, they had been on the alert or in motion for forty-eight hours. Exact directions had to be sent forward to the leading elements. In the case of the 3d Battalion, 16th Infantry, the orders directed that it return to the 16th Infantry's zone by shifting southward over a lateral route connecting the road between Arcole and Oran with that between Fleurus and Oran. The 3d Battalion, 16th Infantry, had already succeeded in slipping past the French forces in Arcole without arousing more than an outpost near a farm along the route, despite the hampering effect of a considerable number of French prisoners. The unit had actually arrived at the city limits and was preparing, in the absence of any opposition, for missions within Oran when an officer from division headquarters arrived with the formal orders directing it to shift to the south and there go into regimental reserve. Colonel Cheadle had to follow an instruction which involved forfeiting advantages already in hand. The battalion (Maj. Frederick W. Gibb) was compelled to pull back and march down a road actually nearer the city than that envisaged in the field order. In consequence, the 3d Battalion, 16th Infantry, soon found itself squarely between the 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, and a sizable French force just as a sharp fire fight broke out. It was pinned down as most of the crossfire passed overhead.

The 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry (Maj. Joseph B. Crawford), had come along the Fleurus–Oran road after overcoming slight resistance at two points, but in the vicinity of St. Eugène it ran against a strongpoint manned by the 1st Battalion, 2d Zouaves, and the 68th Regiment of African Artillery. The fighting at that obstacle persisted for several hours before the French were obliged to surrender.[26] While these operations were in progress, the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, was being brought by truck from La Macta to join the 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, in the assault scheduled for 0715 hours, 10 November.

The two battalions of the 18th Infantry, which had been released from the investment of St. Cloud in order to make parallel advances along the coastal road and the road through Arcole to reach the northerly

[25] (1) Plan is CTF FO 2, 2215, 9 Nov 42. (2) 1st Inf Div FO 3.

[26] (1) CT 16 AAR, 21 Nov 42. (2) CTF G–2 Rpt 5, 10 Nov 42. This reports that 308 French prisoners of war were taken in a six-hour battle. (3) Interv with Col Gibb, 13 Nov 50.

section of the line of departure, could not meet the schedule. The 3d Battalion, 18th Infantry, with the 32d Field Artillery Battalion in support, was engaged in capturing the coastal battery on Pointe Canastel and other French positions in that area throughout the morning. It could not get to Oran itself until about 1350, 10 November. The 2d Battalion, 18th Infantry, which followed the 3d Battalion, 16th Infantry, on the road through Arcole hours later, was less fortunate than Lt. Col. Frederick W. Gibb's force, for it found the defenders at Arcole aroused and stubborn. The French artillery included some 155-mm. guns of the 66th Regiment of African Artillery in positions defended by the 2d Battalion, 2d Zouaves. Although the attacking force overcame the main resistance in a lively engagement, it could not get to the edge of the city before 1100 hours.[27]

Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, undertook in preparation for the attack to concentrate its two task forces near La Sénia airfield. The area through which these forces expected to attack at daylight was level and cultivated, and crossed by several almost parallel roads running north-northwesterly into Oran. A branch railroad embankment crossed these roads between La Sénia airfield and La Sénia village and joined the main line from Ste. Barbe-du-Tlélat through Valmy to Oran. At La Sénia village, almost three miles south of Oran, and at Valmy, about four miles farther south-southeast, the French had assembled forces which had to be reckoned with. Task Force GREEN, reinforced by infantry and other units from X Beach just before daylight, organized for an attack on Valmy in total darkness and still in ignorance of the Center Task Force's final plan of attack. At Tafaraoui airfield Task Force RED prepared to start at daybreak in order to reach, if not a juncture, at least a position for close parallel action by both parts of Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, in attacking Oran without stopping to seize either Valmy or La Sénia villages. General Oliver gathered what supplementary elements he could spare from the roadblocks in the area east of Tafaraoui to strengthen his attacking force, and at 0604 resumed radio communication with Colonel Robinett, transmitting orders to prepare to attack Oran. Robinett had intended to employ Task Force GREEN against the French force near Valmy before swinging toward Oran, but General Oliver could not approve any action which would delay the jump-off beyond the 0715 H Hour set in the Center Task Force's plan.[28] Accordingly, Robinett canceled the operation against the Valmy batteries and the plan of operations was reorganized hurriedly, although to meet the designated H Hour was out of the question even if La Sénia village, like Valmy, were to be bypassed.

By daybreak, 10 November, Oran was completely enveloped by forces which, although at varying distances from the city's limits, were closing in for concentric attack. All sides of the city seemed likely to be penetrated before the end of the day. If the defenders could hold out long enough, a relief force might break through the surrounding cordon, but otherwise the city was bound to capitulate. The ring of encircling American troops had not succeeded in attaining positions for the simultaneous attack

[27] (1) CT 18 AAR, 19 Nov 42. (2) CTF G–2 Rpt 5, 10 Nov 42. This reports that about sixty French prisoners of war were taken.

[28] (1) Msg, CCB to CO 13th Armd Rgt, 0708, 10 Nov 42, in 13th Armd Regt S–3 Jnl. (2) Interv with Gens Oliver and Robinett, 11 Jan 51.

at 0715 as planned on the previous evening, but they would be ready later in the day.

The Final Attack on Oran, 10 November

The *Rodney, Jamaica,* and *Aurora* stood ready to furnish naval gunfire support, and Force H, the Royal Navy's covering force, had come near enough during the night to furnish, if called for, a dive-bombing attack on the battery at Fort du Santon.[29] General Roosevelt's force was expected to persevere in conformity with its original orders until improved communications made it possible for General Allen to supplement them with direct instructions. A Twelfth Air Force Spitfire acting as courier dropped a message near the command post at Bou Sfer before 0900 directing General Roosevelt to "shoot the works on F. O. No. 1 at once."

Earlier, as elements of Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, organized for the attack, the French guns near Valmy began shelling them and drew counterbattery fire for about half an hour. Many French shells exploded near the troops, particularly those in Colonel Robinett's command, but miraculously they caused no casualties. General Oliver's very small advance force was less fortunate in this respect, for its progress was barred by the steep embankment of the railroad and blocked at two underpasses by heaps of disabled vehicles and empty oil drums. While these barriers were being cleared away, shells from guns near Valmy and from heavier coastal guns directed inland struck with destructive effect on some of Oliver's vehicles and personnel. A few of the Valmy 75's were disposed of by fire from Battery C, 27th Armored Field Artillery (with Colonel Robinett), while some well-concealed gun positions east of Valmy were overrun by Company C, 1st Armored Regiment (Capt. Rudolph Barlow), on its way up from Tafaraoui. The coastal guns were neutralized by naval gunfire. Not until after 0900 were elements of Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, almost ready to start into Oran.

From Task Force GREEN, Colonel Robinett sent a composite column under Colonel Todd to the French Military Headquarters in the Chateau Neuf and to the adjacent port. The column consisted of two and one-half companies of light tanks, one company of armored infantry, a tank destroyer section, and some supporting weapons attached to the tank units. On the high ground south of La Sénia he held a small reserve force.

A little later, Colonel Waters accompanied the first section of Company B, 1st Armored Regiment (Capt. William R. Tuck), into the city along a parallel road less than a mile to the east. Clouds of brick-red dust rose behind the vehicles as they crossed the open plain under scattered fire of large-caliber guns which caused no casualties. No sounds of battle could be heard on the La Sénia airfield once the roadblocks at the city's edge had been blasted by gunfire. The two columns shortly after 1015 entered a city silent except for snipers, the only group which remained actively hostile. The public buildings were barricaded but not the streets. Todd's column went straight to General Boissau's headquarters and to the port beyond it. The infantry took measures to

[29] Sources for this section are: (1) Msg files of CTF G–3 Jnl, 10 Nov 42, and 13th Armd Regt S–2 and S–3 Jnls, 10 Nov 42. (2) 1st Bn 6th Armd Inf Sum Jnl, 10 Nov 42. (3) 1st Armd Regt, 27th Armd FA Bn, 6th Armd Inf, and 16th, 18th, and 26th CT's AAR's. (4) Spec Rpt by Maj Gen Terry Allen (Ret.). OCMH. (5) Intervs with Gens Oliver and Robinett, Cols Gibb and Akers, and Lt Col Rudolph Barlow.

prevent further destruction of the invaluable port facilities. Colonel Kern went to Camp St. Philippe and procured the release of its Allied prisoners, totaling about 500. Colonel Waters sent one section of Tuck's company cruising about the city while with another he turned eastward toward the area about to be attacked by the 1st Infantry Division. Some of his tanks ran out of gasoline and had to be refueled within the city, but others demonstrated to General Allen that he would not need the artillery preparation and air strafing attacks which had been rescheduled for noon. His infantry were able to march unopposed to occupy those key points of the city which had been assigned to them, while Colonel Waters gave General Fredendall a ride into Oran in his tank. Meanwhile La Sénia village surrendered without resistance to a small tank detachment from Colonel Robinett's reserves.

General Boissau and a representative of Admiral Rioult accepted the terms of a provisional armistice covering French forces, including coastal batteries, pending agreement on formal terms of surrender. A cease-fire order was issued at 1215. The French tricolor flag was to be flown with the white flag of truce. General Fredendall was asked to confer upon the terms of surrender.

At about 1230, Admiral Rioult and General Boissau met General Fredendall, Colonel Ferenbaugh, Maj. Russell F. Akers, Jr., and others, including a representative of Commodore Troubridge, to negotiate the terms of capitulation. It was agreed that the French tricolor should continue to fly, with the white flag beneath it, that French forces should be confined to quarters but retain their arms, while American troops were to occupy key positions near sea coast defenses, and elsewhere within and near the city, and that harbors, airfields, and other facilities needed by the Center Task Force should be made freely available. General Boissau was to retain his command and to police the city of Oran. All Allied and French prisoners were to be released at once. When Captain Peters, commander of the RESERVIST Force, had been released, the Commanding General, Center Task Force, and his party withdrew. At 0945 next day, Headquarters, Center Task Force, was transferred from the *Largs* to the Grand Hotel in Oran.

The suddenness with which the armored force penetrated Oran, after most of its defenders had been drawn to its outer defenses, brought about surrender there before parallel action could be forced on all the French military installations and units in the field. Combat Team 26, for example, was still struggling to get the guns of Fort du Santon suppressed by air or naval bombardment, and naval shells were still falling there when, at 1330, orders were sent out to the *Rodney* to suspend firing and thus permit the surrender of the battery. The armistice found the 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry, in possession of Aïn et Turk, the 1st Battalion on the heights of Djebel Murdjadjo, from which a force of thirsty, hungry, and dispirited Zouaves had been driven, and the 3d Battalion, which had been relieved on the heights by the 1st Battalion, on its way down the road into Oran. At St. Cloud, the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, reinforced, had been ordered to attack the village on the morning of 10 November. All its attacks were repulsed, and St. Cloud was still in French hands, but the defenders were negotiating for a surrender when they received General Boissau's orders to cease fire. The surrender of St. Cloud yielded some 400 prisoners and fourteen 75-mm. guns, eight

heavy and fifteen light machine guns, four 37-mm. guns, and four 60-mm. mortars. With the end of the fighting at St. Cloud, organized resistance in the Oran area ended. What remained was enough sniping to keep the occupying troops on edge for several days.

Aftermath of Victory

Although a few isolated French units were still shooting at Allied planes, sniping at American troops, and defiantly postponing acceptance of defeat on 11 November, occupation and organization of the area by the Allied forces proceeded speedily. The beaches at Mersa bou Zedjar, Les Andalouses, and near St. Leu were abandoned. The personnel, and such transports as had not already been unloaded and sent back via Gibraltar, were shifted from transport areas into the ports. Arzew, Mers el Kébir, and the outer section of Oran's harbor were available without delay. The inner harbor of Oran could not be used until after a blocking ship had been removed from its entrance channel, and it could be fully used only after other hulks had been pulled from the berths at dockside. During the evening of 10 November, two truck convoys brought naval parties from Arzew to Oran where energetic action brought that port into partial use in a surprisingly short time. Salvage was carried out by U.S. Navy elements, reinforced by a British vessel and its complement. Antisubmarine protection was furnished with matériel supplied by the Royal Navy. French authorities placed all available tugs, salvage equipment lighters, port facilities, and local pilots at the disposal of Rear Adm. Andrew C. Bennett (USN), who, as Commander, U.S. Naval Operating Bases, Oran Area, became responsible for the functioning of the ports.[30] The ports of Nemours, west of Oran, and Mostaganem to the east were surveyed but were found limited to shallow-draft vessels and open to submarine attack. General Fredendall stationed the ground forces under his command near the airfields and in control of the road net leading to Oran. The outlying French communities were inspected, with official visits to the principal military and civil authorities. The paratroopers were ferried eastward for new missions, and the Twelfth Air Force elements labored to organize the fields at Tafaraoui and La Sénia for maintenance and efficient control of air operations. The first follow-up convoy could be expected on 13 November.

For the problems of a political nature which would confront the Center Task Force once hostilities were suspended, General Fredendall had been furnished with a political adviser, Mr. Leland L. Rounds. He was a civilian who had been in Oran for the preceding year and a half, until shortly before the expedition left the United Kingdom, as one of the consular representatives of the United States. He was also deputy civil administrator under Mr. Robert Murphy of General Eisenhower's headquarters. The nearness of Oran to Spanish Morocco and to the Spanish mainland made necessary, as the planners of Operation TORCH had well recognized, that the Allied foothold in the area be firmly established. The French civil administration was controlled by adherents of the government at Vichy. For several months, the fascistic *Service d'Ordre Legionaire* and similar organizations had been molesting those suspected of anti-Vichy or pro-de Gaulle sentiments. A number of Ger-

[30] Rpt, Adm Bennett to CinC US Fleet, 30 Nov 42, sub: Opns of US naval forces CTF. Div of Naval Hist A 16–3.



MAJ. GEN. LLOYD R. FREDENDALL, *center, U.S. Commander of the Center Task Force. From left, officers are Brig. Gen. Lunsford E. Oliver, Brig. Gen. Lowell Rooks, General Fredendall, Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark, and Brig. Gen. James H. Doolittle. (Photograph taken December 1942.)*

man and Italian armistice commissioners had been working with a network of pro-Axis sympathizers in Oran. Mr. Rounds and Colonel Bentley, who had been released earlier that same day, and a party of four enlisted men on 10 November gathered up a suitcase full of documents at the villa which had been hurriedly vacated by the German commissioners and turned them over to Col. Edwin B. Howard, G–2, Center Task Force.

Identifying and restraining Axis sympathizers in the Oran area proved unwelcome to General Fredendall. He adopted the policy of "very mild arrangements" and of permitting civil officials to retain their positions undisturbed. The inevitable hostility which existed between such officials and the pro-American Frenchmen who had risked their lives or personal freedom before the landings in order to prevent a useless battle encouraged the administrative authorities to make reprisals on them. The relative unconcern of the American military leadership made it necessary for the Americans with whom they had co-operated before the invasion to protect these anti-Axis French. For both the Frenchmen who had taken such risks and those Americans who were concerned with their misfortunes after the victory, the events of the ensuing weeks were deeply disillusioning. The fact that Allied military policy in these matters was never put to the test by an Axis counterattack in the vicinity may have been fortunate.[31]

The seizure of Oran was accomplished in less than three days by military means alone. Of the three great task forces, the Center Task Force was the only one which could subsequently claim to have won a decision wholly by force of arms. Success at Oran resulted from a series of circumstances, some fortuitous and some the result of imaginative planning or energetic improvisation. Well-calculated measures got the convoys to their destinations without enemy interference. Surprise got them ashore without significant French opposition. Determination got them inland and at their main objective rapidly. As General Fredendall radioed to General Eisenhower, they "went to town." No arm or service, except perhaps the airborne group, was superflous to the victory of the Center Task Force and each performed outstanding feats, but none was more clearly responsible for the swiftness of the French collapse than the armored force. In little more than forty-eight hours after being brought offshore, one portion of that force had arrived in the heart of Oran and another had demonstrated its invulnerability to French armor. Casualties had been below expectations, and fell most severely on the ill-considered Royal Navy project for storming Oran harbor by direct assault from the two small cutters. About half of those engaged were killed and only about 10 percent emerged unscathed. They were the preponderant portion of the 1st Armored Division's losses, of 191 killed, 105 wounded, and 9 missing, a casualty figure in comparison with which the losses incurred by Task Forces GREEN and RED were negligible. The 1st Infantry Division's casualties—85 killed, 221 wounded, and 7 missing—reflected the hard fighting in which the division was engaged at various points and the fact that it had faced so large a proportion of the enemy. Other units, including the Parachute Task Force, sustained but minor losses. The enemy's

[31] (1) Memo, Maj Thomas G. Young, Jr., for Col Howard, 1 Dec 42, sub: Security in Oran area, in CTF G–2 Jnl. (2) TORCH Anthology, Vol. I, Ch. 9, pp. 9, 12–13. CIA OSS Archives.

casualties were less than those of the attacking force, and considerably less than among French units defending Casablanca, Port-Lyautey, and Safi.[32]

With Oran in Allied hands, the Center Task Force prepared to establish contact with the Western Task Force through the Taza gap, and with the Eastern Task Force in the vicinity of Orléansville.

[32] Reliable statistics are lacking, but the proportion is indicated roughly in *Pétain et les Allemands, mémorandum d'Abetz sur les rapports franco-allemands* (Paris, 1948), p. 185. This lists French killed at Casablanca as 475, at Oran 165, and at Algiers, 11. At Casablanca the wounded were even more numerous.

CHAPTER XIII

The Occupation of Algiers

Algiers was the most important objective of Operation TORCH. The Allied Force was directed, it will be remembered, to establish lodgments elsewhere in French North Africa as a step preliminary to seizing the easternmost protectorate, Tunisia. Algiers was the area most closely related to the Tunisian phase of the operation. The port, the railroad terminal, the working space for a supply base, and the two airfields made the city a prize, while the facilities for housing and offices made it the likeliest place for Allied Force Headquarters when that agency could be moved from London. Allied control of the rear area during fighting in Tunisia or any subsequent operation in the Mediterranean theater would center readily in Algiers. It was the capital of Algeria and the seat of government for all French North Africa. The French system of civil and military administration focused there. The presence of the principal figures in the government of French North Africa would make the city the probable scene of the extraordinarily difficult French choice between neutrality and resumption of hostilities against the Axis countries.

Measures for winning Algiers without bloodshed or creating rankling resentments were well advanced and, if successful, would find the French armed forces rallying to the leadership of General Giraud and returning to war for the liberation of France, with or without the open approbation of the government at Vichy.

Military operations at Algiers were actually to lead to an armistice earlier than at Oran or Casablanca, but were to be followed by two days of negotiations during which the intentions of Marshal Pétain in Vichy remained uncertain. Operation TORCH at this juncture became more political than military, if the two spheres can be differentiated when political negotiations are being carried on by military men with military purposes in view. The first concern here is with the amphibious operations of 8 November, and after that with the politics. For the sake of clarity, the geographical sequence from west to east will be followed in relating the history of the landings and initial penetration of the area near Algiers.[1]

The Plan of Attack

The Eastern Assault Force plan for capturing Algiers did not rely on possible assistance by friendly French elements ashore

[1] The basic sources for this chapter are the following: (1) Incl 2 (Rpt of The Naval Commander, Eastern Task Force, Rear-Admiral H. M. Burrough) of NCXF, TORCH Despatch. (2) EAF FO 1, 4 Oct 42. (3) 39th Inf Hist, 23 Oct 43. (4) 168th Inf Hist, 15 Oct–12 Nov 42. (5) 175th FA Bn War Diary, 8 Nov 42–2 Mar 43. (6) CinC AF Diary. (7) The chief source for the operations of British Army and Royal Air Force units has been information furnished in response to specific inquiries addressed by the author to the Historical Section, Cabinet Office, London, and the Air Historical Branch, Air Ministry, London (hereafter cited as Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London, or Info supplied by Air Ministry, London).

but was based on an analysis of the terrain and the defenses. Of the ground troops at Algiers 7,000 were believed to be in the immediate vicinity of the city, 4,500 to be west of it in the area of Cherchel–Koléa–Blida–Miliana, and 3,500 east of it near Dellys–Tizi Ouzou–Fort National and Aumâle. Far to the west near Orléansville and well to the east at Sétif were the next potential supporting ground units. The Algiers garrison included an armored unit of old-style tanks and armored cars. From the Maison Blanche and Blida airdromes, fifty-two fighters and thirty-nine bombers could contribute to the defense. At the coast were twelve or thirteen fortified and protected batteries with infrared thermal detectors and range-finder stations, predecessors of radar apparatus for such purposes. The three principal batteries included one in the old fort at Cap Sidi Ferruch, one near Pointe Pescade at Fort Duperré, and the Batterie du Lazaret on Cap Matifou near Fort d'Estrées, but others commanded the port and bay of Algiers and all sea approaches for miles on both sides of the city. The first mission for each major element of the landing force was therefore to gain possession of the coastal batteries near the beach at which it came ashore.

The guns of Batterie du Lazaret, of Fort Duperré, and on the Jetée du Nord in the port, with their direction finders, searchlight installations, and other equipment, were to be captured intact and held for transfer to Allied coast artillery units. Other guns were either to be immobilized by removal of essential parts or to be demolished.[2]

Three zones of attack were selected for the landings and designated in conformity with British usage as Apples, Beer, and Charlie Sectors (instead of Able, Baker, and Cast zones). Apples Sector lay west of Algiers between Castiglione and a point about five miles southwest of Cap Sidi Ferruch. Beer Sector extended from Cap Sidi Ferruch to St. Eugéne, a small village near the northwestern corner of Algiers bay. Charlie Sector was on the eastern side of Cap Matifou off Aïn Taya and Surcouf. In picking these areas, the Eastern Assault Force had had to forego use of the best landing beach near Algiers, that on the eastern shore of Algiers bay, because it lay within range of coastal guns which might escape neutralization until after the initial landing phase. (*Map 3*)

Two pairs of landing beaches were designated on either side of Cap Sidi Ferruch, Apples GREEN and WHITE along the seven miles nearest Castiglione, and Beer GREEN and WHITE just east of Cap Sidi Ferruch. On the rugged shore three miles east of the projection of Rass Acrata to a point within the bay of Algiers almost a mile southeast of Pointe Pescade, four sections of Beer RED beach were designated in coves and small bays. Landing beaches called Charlie GREEN, BLUE, RED 1, and RED 2 were selected in the sector between Jean-Bart and the mouth of the Rérhaïa river.

The Apples Sector on the west faced an inshore area with a narrow undulating coastal shelf rising to a set of parallel wooded ridges about three miles from the sea. Beyond these ridges lay the most intensively cultivated plain in Algeria, and on its far side the foothills of the Atlas Tellian. The village of Castiglione on the southwest of Apples GREEN Beach numbered fewer than 4,000 population, about one half of them Europeans. On the ridge south of Apples WHITE was Koléa, a larger com-

[2] (1) Dir to CG EAF, 10 Oct 42. AFHQ G–3 Ops E/300/1 Micro Job 10A, Reel 5C. (2) Br. First Army Opn Instr No. 4, 15 Oct 42. DRB AGO.

munity with a substantial garrison. The ridges extended eastward as far as a river valley running northward to enter the ocean at the eastern end of Apples WHITE. Beyond that stream, the complex hill mass which protected Algiers on the west widened out.

The Beer Sector fronted this higher hill mass. Beach Beer GREEN on the west extended along the bay from the eastern side of Cap Sidi Ferruch headland. Beer WHITE was near the center of the shore between Cap Sidi Ferruch and Rass Acrata point. Beer RED had four distinct sections separated by points and bluffs, at Cap Caxine, Pointe Pescade, and near St. Eugène. Two major overland routes from the Beer Sector to Algiers crossed from west to east. The first was a coastal road through small beach communities and along the cliffs, a distance from Cap Sidi Ferruch to Algiers of some sixteen miles. The second and shorter route ran through an abandoned Trappist agricultural community to the town of Cheragas, on a ridge about 600 feet above sea level, and thence through the fashionable suburb of Lambiridi (formerly known as El Biar) to the steep downward slope of the city's western edge. Two secondary roads, one leading from Beer WHITE to Bouzarea and the other from Beer GREEN via Ouled Fayet, flanked the short route. These routes were accessible over fairly easy slopes partly covered with vineyards, but Beer RED's four sections offered only small footholds at the base of high steep slopes and were chosen because they were near coastal batteries on the heights above them.

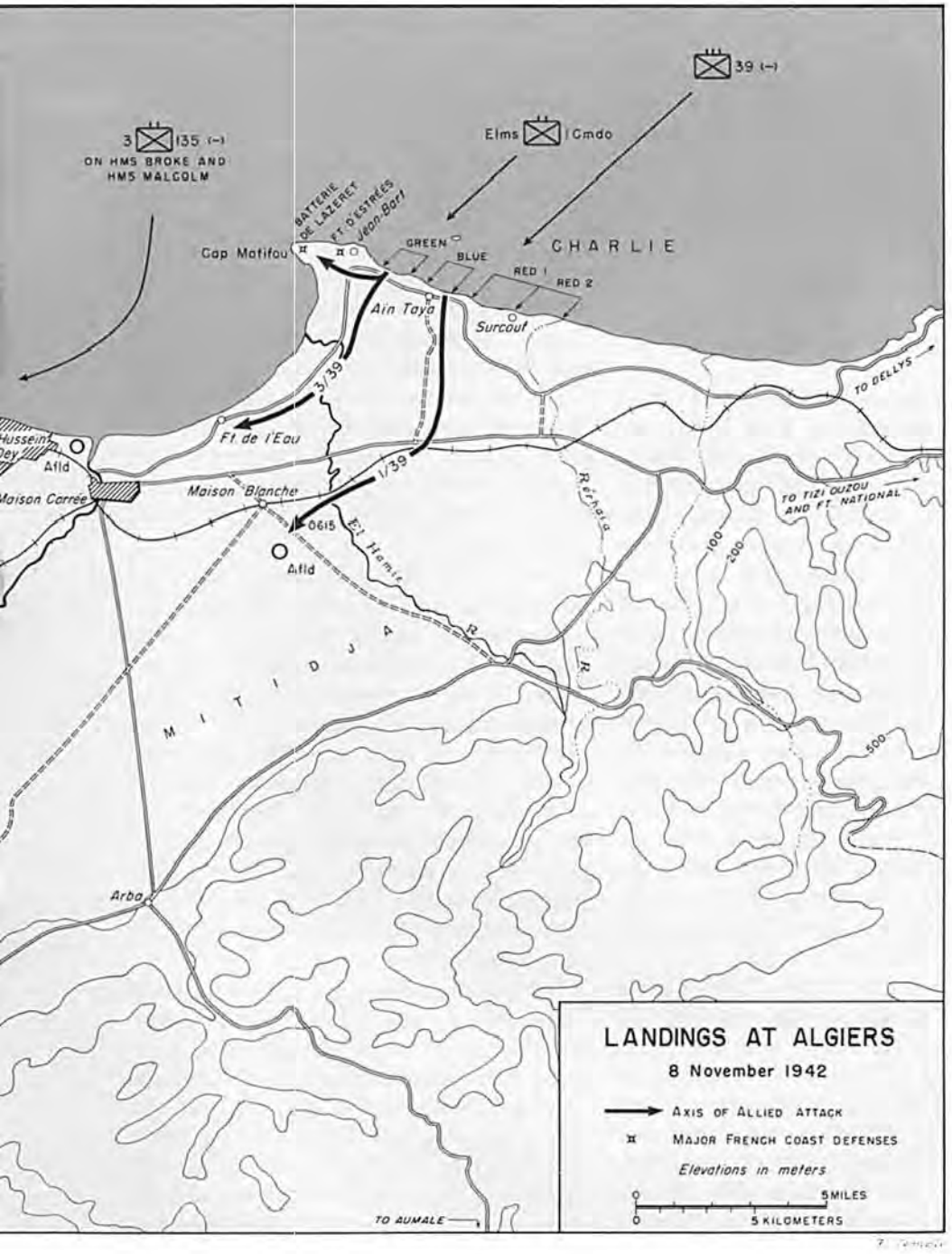
The hinterland of the Charlie Sector differed sharply from that west of Algiers. Beach Charlie GREEN, near the tiny fishing hamlet of Jean-Bart; BLUE, squarely in front of Aïn Taya village; and RED 1 and 2, near the beach resort of Surcouf on the eastern flank, were all smooth and of a fairly easy grade; but Beaches BLUE and GREEN led to a low escarpment with limited exits. Once that barrier had been surmounted and a ridge had been crossed, the northeastern portion of the Plaine de la Mitidja stretched beyond the horizon toward the southwest and offered easy access to Algiers from the east and south.

The Eastern Naval Task Force, besides assigning escorts to three groups of troop and cargo transports, was prepared to furnish antiaircraft protection from a ship especially equipped for such a mission at each landing sector, to supply air support from the aircraft carrier *Argus* and the auxiliary carrier *Avenger,* and to provide naval gunfire support on call. A forward observation officer was expected to move inland with each landing team, keeping in touch by radio with a fire support ship assigned to his sector. If heavier fire than that available from a destroyer was needed, it could be requested through combined support control (on the headquarters ship *Bulolo*) from one of four cruisers, *Sheffield, Bermuda, Scylla,* and *Charybdis.* Of the seven forward observation officers one was with the force at Apples Sector, four were with those landing at Beer Sector, and two with the troops at Charlie Sector. In the case of calls for gunfire from the cruisers, a safety margin of 2,000 yards between the target and the nearest Allied troops was deemed necessary.

Naval aircraft were prepared to assist the fire support ships in bombarding the coastal batteries with the aid of flares, if necessary before daylight, and after daylight with dive-bombing, spotting, or smoke-laying, as requested. An interval of at least thirty minutes after a request was made was to be expected before bombers could reach a given target. Naval aircraft would furnish


6 Cmdo
168
I Cmdo (-)
36 BR
RESERVE
BEER RED
Pte. Pescade
FT DUPERRÉ
St Eugen
Ross Acrata
F/168
270
WHITE
BEER
La Bouzaréa
168 (-)
GREEN
ALGIERS
Cap Sidi Ferruch
Cheragas
Lambiridi
II BR
Ouled Fayet
Birmandreis
1/168
Zeralda
WHITE
APPLES
Dovera
GREEN
Castiglione
Koléa
Bir Touta
5/NH (+)
2/LF
El Harrach R.
Mazafran R.
PLAINE DE
Boufarik
Elms I Cmdo
0700
Afld
100
200
500
1000
Blida
TO CHERCHEL

MAP 3


39 (-)
3 135 (-)
ON HMS BROKE AND HMS MALCOLM
Elms I Cmdo
BATTERIE DE LAZERET
FT D'ESTRÉES
Jean-Bart
Cap Matifou
GREEN
BLUE
RED 1
RED 2
CHARLIE
Ain Taya
Surcouf
3/39
1/39
Ft de l'Eau
Afld
Maison Carrée
Maison Blanche
0615
El Harrach
Réghaia
TO BELLYS
TO TIZI OUZOU AND FT. NATIONAL
100
200
500
MITIDJA
Arba
TO AUMALE
LANDINGS AT ALGIERS
8 November 1942
AXIS OF ALLIED ATTACK
MAJOR FRENCH COAST DEFENSES
Elevations in meters
5 MILES
5 KILOMETERS

tactical reconnaissance and fighter patrols until Maison Blanche airdrome had been captured and occupied by Royal Air Force fighter squadrons of the Eastern Air Command. The land-based planes would thereafter take over air defense of the airfield, the port, and the convoys as well as reconnaissance and close support missions.[3]

Arrival at the Beaches

The *Bulolo* and the fifteen assault transports of the Eastern Naval Task Force continued on an easterly course along the thirty-seventh parallel throughout daylight on 7 November, but at 1800, as darkness was falling, turned toward Algiers and soon divided into three columns. The transports for the eastern landings, with escorts, headed for a rendezvous with a beacon submarine northeast of Cap Matifou; the other two groups formed a double column and continued together to a point northwest of Cap Sidi Ferruch. There they separated at about 2130 hours, one section seeking rendezvous with its beacon submarine north of Cap Sidi Ferruch and the other, north of Castiglione. Admiral Burrough and General Ryder, the two commanders, were on the headquarters ship *Bulolo* with the center group nearest Cap Sidi Ferruch.

The slower cargo section of the Algiers convoy, after passing through the Strait of Gibraltar on 6 November with the troop transports, took a shorter route to the attack zone, a course running closer to the African shore. This slower section was almost due north of Cherchel and well to the southwest of the swifter troop transports when at dusk the latter had turned southward toward Algiers. The cargo ships then grouped themselves into three sections, each of which was destined for one sector, and took easterly courses that brought them to their destinations just as the landings were beginning.[4]

The Eastern force at Apples Sector consisted of three troopships (*Karanja, Viceroy of India,* and *Marnix van Suit Aldegonde*), five cargo ships (*Manchester, Lalande, Ocean Wanderer, Ocean Viceroy,* and *Dewdale*), and the antiaircraft vessel *Pozarica.* The sloops *Enchantress* and *Stork* and the corvettes *Convolvulus* and *Marigold* were assigned as escorts. The destroyer *Bramham* was available for gunfire support. Aboard the assault transports were units of the British 11th Infantry Brigade Group, a force totaling 7,230 officers and enlisted men.[5]

The 11th Infantry Brigade Group's initial missions were to seize control of two key bridges on the coastal road east of Apples WHITE and to establish southern flank protection for the Beer Sector along roads from Castiglione through Koléa to Bir Touta. North of this road rose the green-clad heights at the edge of the broad Mitidja plain. From the vicinity of Bir Touta and the quiet elevations of Dovera, a health resort, the force was to be ready to move into Algiers, if needed, or southwest about fifteen miles to Blida to support an attack on the airdrome there.

The larger proportion of enemy troops and coastal guns lay in Beer Sector, to which an Allied force of 10,421 officers and enlisted men was brought on five troopships (*Keren, Winchester Castle, Otranto, Sobieski,* and *Awatea*) and ten cargo vessels. The *Palomares* was to furnish antiaircraft protection. The monitor *Roberts* and the destroyers *Blyskavica* and *Wilton* were des-

[3] EAF FO 1 with annexes, 4 Oct 42.

[4] Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch," Plan 4.

[5] Statistics taken from Annex 5 to EAF FO 1, 4 Oct 42.

ignated for fire support. Troops of the reinforced 168th Infantry (34th Division Combat Team) were expected to move from Beer GREEN to seize Fort de Sidi Ferruch and capture its guns and infrared installations, from Beer WHITE to gain control of a warning device on the projection of Rass Acrata, and from the separate sections of Beer RED to capture similar installations on Cap Caxine and Point 270, and to occupy the battery at Fort Duperré. While some elements were engaged in these missions at the coast, others were to press inland through Cheragas to the heights of La Bouzaréa, almost 1,500 feet above sea level, and thence down into Algiers. Many key points in the city and the port were designated for swift seizure.

Group Charlie, the 39th Combat Team (9th Division) reinforced, was embarked on the assault ships *Samuel Chase, Leedstown, Almaack, Dempo* and *Exceller,* the first three of which were combat loaders and the other two carried a high proportion of vehicles, and the slow ships *Macharda* and *Maron.* The antiaircraft ship *Tynwald* and the fire support destroyers *Cowdray* and *Zetland* were the principal escort vessels. The mission of the 39th Combat Team was to capture the airfield at Maison Blanche, the towns of Maison Carrée and Husseïn Dey, and close Algiers from the southeast.

A reserve group off Apples and Beer Sectors, the 36th Infantry Brigade Group of over 7,100 men, remained afloat in eight troop and cargo transports subject to call.

In the Eastern Assault Force total of 33,376 men were elements of the Royal Navy, most of whom served as landing craft crews and unloading parties, although some performed duties on the beaches. Also included were large numbers of troops to organize and defend the beaches, to move supplies inland if the action should continue for several days, and to serve as Royal Air Force ground troops. It was only natural to hope that operations could be transferred to the port of Algiers in time to make it possible to unload many units and much matériel on docks.

The Western Landings

The landings of 11th Infantry Brigade Group (Br.) on the Apples Sector near Castiglione went smoothly. The lights of that town shown brightly, the night was clear, the swell was moderate, and disembarkation proceeded with few difficulties. From the *Karanja,* the *Viceroy of India,* and the Dutch transport *Marnix van Suit Aldegonde,* assault troops of the 1st Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment, 5th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment, and 2d Battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers took their places in landing craft, which then formed up for movement to the beaches. A moderate breeze from the northeast and a westerly current, both of which carried the landing craft several miles from scheduled positions during the assembly, failed to hinder the operation. The piloting parties from the beacon submarine were taken aboard motor launches. The submarine then went to a point two miles offshore and released a marker team in a collapsible boat, which in turn took station only 400 yards off Apples GREEN and commenced flashing a navigation signal to the incoming waves of landing craft.

At 2350, they started toward shore. At 0100, they began arriving at what were found to be rough and dangerous beaches, but by careful handling disembarked all

boatloads without mishap.[6] No resistance was offered, and the force readily continued on its inland missions. Before daylight, the troops secured the bridges and took Castiglione, Koléa, and Zéralda, where they seized a radio station. Headquarters of the 11th Infantry Brigade landed at 0230 on Apples WHITE. Units of the French Army, encountered at Koléa barracks, declared that they had been instructed not to resist.

The 168th Combat Team (Col. John W. O'Daniel) of 4,355 Americans and 1,065 British, to which part of the 1st Commando and all of the 6th Commando (British and American) were attached, began landings west of Algiers at 0100 under control of Capt. R. J. Shaw (RN), senior naval officer landings, on the *Keren*. Some 900 officers and enlisted men of the Commando units left the *Otranto* and the *Awatea* for various points along the coast from Cap Sidi Ferruch to the northwest corner of the bay of Algiers. Landing on Beer GREEN, five troops of the 1st Commando were expected immediately to capture Fort de Sidi Ferruch and secure the defense installations there. Using the "scramble" beaches of Beer RED, beaches which were to be swiftly crossed and not organized for protracted use and defense, the 6th Commando (ten troops) had orders initially to seize Fort Anglais, Fort Independence, the infrared stations at Rass Acrata and Cap Caxine, and then to take Fort Duperré and an observation station at Point 270.[7] They were thus to silence the coastal batteries which menaced the waiting ships offshore. At the same time, the first infantry units were to land, assemble, reorganize, and prepare to advance inland.

[6] App. IV (Rpt of R.N. Beach and Pilotage Party, 8 Dec 42) to Incl 2 of NCXF, TORCH Despatch.

[7] 168th CT FO 1, 14 Oct 42.

The men of the 1st Commando, heading for Fort de Sidi Ferruch, landed near their objective and hastened before 0300 to take possession from the nonresisting garrison. Colonel Baril, who had come from Koléa for the purpose, formally surrendered the fort to Lt. Col. T. H. Trevor (Br.), commander. From the ships, watchers at the rail saw the signal that the fort and coastal batteries had been taken; the mounting tension was relieved. Thus far, plans seemed to be going well.[8]

The 6th Commando did not fare so well. Many of the landing craft in which its troops were to be conveyed from the *Awatea* had to come alongside from other vessels. Delays attributable to this arrangement were increased during the shoreward movement by the breakdown of landing craft engines and by the unseaworthiness of many boats. The first to land were two hours behind schedule; the last, more than five hours. Most of the craft sought their designated landing points without the benefit of the piloting party. In consequence, it was broad daylight, 0815, before Fort Duperré was encircled.[9] Not until after an air attack by nine Albacores of the Fleet Air Arm, followed by a limited ground assault, was the fort surrendered to the 6th Commando during the afternoon. A prospective naval bombardment was then hurriedly canceled.

Before daylight, the infantry operations were also thrown into confusion. The 1st

[8] When General Mast was notified that landings were imminent, he urged that they be made at Cap Sidi Ferruch and adjoining beaches. Msg RC 35, Felix Cole to Secy of State Hull, 4 Nov 42; see also Msg, Algiers to Gen Handy, 31 Oct 42. Copies in WDCSA 381 TORCH Sec 2.

[9] Maj J. E. H. MacLeod, Account of Operation TORCH Compiled From Accounts of Troop Commanders, 6 Commando, on the Operation West of Algiers, 7–8 November 1942, 21 Nov 42. Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

Battalion, 168th Infantry, was scheduled to land nearest Cap Sidi Ferruch on Beer GREEN, while the 2d Battalion made simultaneous use of Beer WHITE. The assault companies were to pass through the dunes and continue across gradually rising ground through vineyards and scrub-pine woods to two battalion assembly areas. They were to advance thence along secondary branch roads to the main highway between Castiglione and Algiers. Their route would then take them past several hamlets and the village of Cheragas to Lambiridi, about ten miles from the beaches. They were expected to reach the high ground dominating Algiers before sunrise and to be closely followed by a stream of reinforcements for the final operations to gain control of the city. The French Army barracks and defensive positions which lay in the path of advance were to be brought under control through surprise attacks, and the administrative headquarters in old Fort l'Empereur, directly west of Algiers, was to be occupied.

The routes and schedule of advance thus planned were drastically modified almost at the outset of the landing operation. For the basic procedure designed to guide the landing craft to assigned beaches foundered. The same motor launch which was to take aboard a pilot for Beer WHITE from the beacon submarine first had to embark the principal beachmaster from one of the transports; when that task had been accomplished, its crew could not find the submarine from which it was to take off the pilot. The motor launch eventually went toward the beach without him. The submarine waited vainly until it was scheduled to move inshore, and then transferred the pilot to the nearest available landing craft. The pilot was thus able to guide formations from the *Winchester Castle* and the *Otranto* toward Beer GREEN. The motor launch, however, led the troops meant for Beer WHITE toward what turned out instead to be a landfall in the Apples Sector far to the west, among troops of the 11th Infantry Brigade Group (Br.). Some of the landing craft guided by the pilot toward Beer GREEN were carried off course and reached the shore between Beer GREEN and Beer WHITE. Thus the first waves of the 168th Combat Team were forced to improvise as soon as they touched the African shore.

Components of each battalion were scattered along fifteen miles of coast. The scarcity of tank lighters retarded the arrival of vehicles, heavy weapons, and equipment. From the beginning, machine guns, mortars, and boxes of ammunition had to be hand-carried along the routes to Algiers by soldiers of the heavy weapons units, who found it impossible to maintain the rapid pace set by the less-encumbered rifle companies. Heavy swells, offshore obstacles, soft sand, or difficult beach exits made desirable the early closing of Beer GREEN and of all but 200 yards of Beer WHITE, which as a result became seriously congested.[10] Communication by radio among units ashore failed because of damage to many instruments during the landings and because of the insufficient range of others. A few bantam cars and trucks raced up and down the roads, carrying officers in search of missing parts of their commands or shuttling troops and weapons toward the front. Civilian transport was requisitioned. Control of the operation was imperfect but sufficient to organize an advance.

The 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry, was the most seriously scattered. Somewhat

[10] App. IV (Rpt of R.N. Beach and Pilotage Party, 8 Dec 42) to Incl 2 of NCXF, TORCH Despatch.

more than half its strength had arrived at Beach Beer GREEN by 0130, but the remainder, including the commanding officer, Lt. Col. Edward J. Doyle, was delivered at points southwest of Cap Sidi Ferruch on the wrong side of that headland, and as far southwest as the Apples Beaches. The contingent at Beer GREEN sought the battalion assembly area in the vicinity of Sidi Ferruch and waited there while Capt. Edward W. Bird of Company B rode forward on reconnaissance toward Lambiridi with two British officers. At the French barracks west of the town, they aroused the occupants to hostile action and hastily withdrew, leaving one of the British officers a captive. In the absence of both the battalion commander and executive officer whose mission it was to organize beach defense, command of the battalion passed temporarily to Captain Bird. As daylight came, about 0830, the 1st Battalion began its march along the southern route, via (La Trappe) Ouled Fayet to Lambiridi, with the mission of protecting the Combat Team's south flank.

The Capture of Lambiridi and of Blida Airdrome

Colonel Doyle overtook the column during the early stage of this movement and led it aggressively through sporadic resistance as far as the outskirts of Lambiridi. From high ground on the western fringe of the town, a defending French force fired down upon the invaders. The advance halted while the 2d Battalion came up on the left and a co-ordinated assault was in preparation.

The 2d Battalion Landing Team, commanded by Lt. Col. Dewey H. Baer, was separated into numerous scattered parties during the landing phase. Nine boatloads from Companies E and F, commanded by Maj. Robert R. Moore, Battalion Executive Officer, which had been scheduled to land at 0100 from the *Keren* at Beach Beer WHITE, touched down instead at Beer GREEN. They hastened along the highway to rejoin the rest of the unit, and advanced along the northern route to La Bouzaréa, catching up with another portion and with Colonel Baer during the final stage of their approach to Lambiridi. Still other elements of the 2d Battalion, which had landed farther afield, came up later in the day.

Colonel O'Daniel with a party from his headquarters did not arrive at Beer WHITE until about 0700, after several hours at sea. They had first been taken to Apples WHITE and then brought back along the coast to the correct destination. When the 3d Battalion Landing Team (Lt. Col. Stewart T. Vincent) began landing from the *Otranto* shortly after 0730, the rifle companies went forward to strengthen the impending attack on Lambiridi, the heavy weapons company struggling without transport vehicles to keep up with the riflemen. At noon, the regimental command post moved to the vicinity of Cheragas, and Colonel O'Daniel went on toward Lambiridi to expedite the attack through it against Fort l'Empereur.

Shortly after noon, Baer's 2d Battalion on the left (north), Vincent's 3d Battalion on the right of the most direct route, and Doyle's 1st Battalion working up from the south to the right rear started into Lambiridi. The 2d Battalion had forced back some outposts of resisting French troops. The 3d Battalion was newly arrived, and thus far without hostile encounter. The 1st Battalion, after a minor brush with French troops in an outlying barracks, was drawn to the northeast by the sound of firing. Al-

though some of the regimental mortars were available for the attack, there was a disturbing absence of antitank guns. The 3d Battalion found Lambiridi's streets at first silent and empty. Company K approached the square in the center of the town by the main street. It was stopped abruptly by a French armored car which sent heavy machine gun fire in irregular bursts to drive the men to cover. Concealed riflemen then took up the fire and prevented resumption of the advance. The fighting in Lambiridi continued throughout the afternoon, a French Red Cross ambulance driving about to collect the wounded of both sides.

Colonel Doyle, Captain Bird, and a detachment of about twenty-five men from the 1st Battalion left the others, worked around the southern edge of Lambiridi, and continued into Algiers. The small party arrived about 1500, 8 November, at the Palais d'Eté and captured it. After guards had been placed at its gate and in its vicinity, the intrepid group started on to secure the Police Station, and to capture the German consul. Concealed snipers suddenly fired at them, killing Colonel Doyle and wounding one enlisted man.

The troops near the center of Lambiridi remained pinned down, but flanking parties overcame the armored resistance and kept on to the vicinity of old Fort l'Empereur. Perhaps fifty men of Company F and K took up positions northwest of the objective while, on the east and south, parts of Companies I and L ranged themselves with Browning automatic rifles (BAR's) and light machine guns at points of vantage. The entrance could be approached only by crossing an open ravine. The attackers felt unequal to the task, and darkness fell as they waited for reinforcement and planned for action next morning.

The progress of Colonel O'Daniel's command toward Algiers had met weak resistance during the morning after initial uncontested success, only because of a change in the French chain of command. General Mast had ordered the troops of his Algiers Division to assist the landings, accepting the Allies as friends, and to join them in preparing to resist an Axis attack. A few hours later, General Koeltz, Mast's superior, canceled these orders and relieved Mast of his command, replacing him with General Roubertie. Mast had gone to the vicinity of Beer GREEN Beach, where he had seen and advised some of the Americans, while Colonel Baril had left Koléa to assume personal charge of the peaceful transfer of Fort de Sidi Ferruch to the Americans. But General Roubertie instructed troops of the Algiers Division to disregard all orders emanating from Mast and to resist the invasion energetically. Thereupon, French troops in the path of O'Daniel's men near La Bouzaréa and Lambiridi began to contest the advance toward Algiers.[11]

Capturing Blida airdrome was a mission which, despite its importance, the Allied plan had made an alternative secondary task for elements of the 11th Infantry Brigade Group (Br.), to be accomplished either late on D Day or on D plus 1. Maison Blanche airfield was to be the base for the first land-based aircraft to come from Gibraltar. But Blida airdrome was being held by friendly French forces under command of General de Monsabert and during the early morning hours by a French air commander willing to accept de Monsabert's directions. General Giraud was expected to land there to assume the role of national

[11](1) 168th Inf Hist, 15 Oct–12 Nov 42. (2) Kammerer, *Du débarquement Africain au meurtre de Darlan,* pp. 252–54.

leadership. The favorable situation might well shift before Giraud arrived unless de Monsabert should be reinforced by Allied troops as early as possible. General Mast had therefore gone to Beer Sector not only to superintend the voluntary surrender of Fort de Sidi Ferruch but to expedite the Allied thrust to Blida airdrome. Motor transport requisitioned from Koléa was waiting in readiness to transport a substantial detachment over the roads about twenty-five miles to the objective. Mast met and persuaded Colonel Trevor, commanding the 1st Commando detachment, to undertake the mission despite the fact that it necessitated a departure from Combat Team 168's plan. Accordingly, about 0415, a portion of his Commando force started for the airdrome.[12]

Other troops also went to Blida. Since the 11th Infantry Brigade Group encountered no resistance on the west flank, part of it was available either for strengthening the attack on Algiers or for taking Blida airdrome. A reconnaissance party under Lt. Col. L. A. Manly, 2d Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers, was sent to Blida about 0800, and was followed between 1100 and 1600 by all but one company of the remainder of that battalion in requisitioned transport or afoot.

Colonel Trevor's detachment reached the airdrome about 0900, but when Trevor entered into negotiation with Colonel Monstrelet, the French air officer commanding, he would not agree to uncontested occupation by the Commandos, in view of contrary orders from Algiers. Trevor's men were disposed near the main gate to the airdrome, which was closed, and waited there for reinforcements before provoking hostile action. In the late afternoon, the 2d Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers (minus one company), under Colonel Manly, arrived, and later in the day, a portion of 84th Light Antiaircraft Battery (Br.) and four Bofors guns. The French garrison remained in possession of the field, which though neutralized could be used by Allied airplanes only to land and remain grounded.[13]

About noon, General Evelegh ordered the 5th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment, and a detachment of the 1st Battalion of East Surrey Regiment, to the southern outskirts of Algiers, a movement which they accomplished in the course of the afternoon and evening. At 1700, the 6th Battalion of the Royal West Kent Regiment, which had been the floating reserve of the 11th Infantry Brigade, was ordered to disembark at Beer WHITE Beach and to move into the area near Birmandreïs as relief for the 5th Northamptons. Through rising surf which soon afterward precluded beach landings, the battalion came ashore and started inland, but it was not needed, and re-embarked at 0700 next morning to go into combat for the first time farther east.

[12] (1) Rpt of Capt Bird, 168th Inf Hist, 15 Oct–12 Nov 42. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[13] Planes from the aircraft carrier *Argus* took up a patrol above the airfield at daybreak and saw white flags being waved. On authorization from his commander, Lt. B. H. C. Nation (RN) landed at about 0800, taxied to the hangars, and obtained a written message that Blida airdrome was at the disposal of Allied forces for landing purposes. For a time, he remained the sole Allied representative on the airfield. When the troops arrived less than an hour later, Lieutenant Nation was reported to have flown back to the carrier leaving the situation to them. (1) Br. Admiralty, The War at Sea, III, 376–77. (2) Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch," p. 29, citing *Fleet Air Arm* (H. M. Stationery Office, pp. 117–18. (3) The author has found no confirmation of this episode in contemporary records, but Lieutenant Nation has repeated the account to the Air Historical Branch, Air Ministry, London.

Allied forces landing west of Algiers in the Apples and Beer Sectors had thus achieved on D Day all their major objectives short of the occupation of Algiers itself, although proceeding toward that goal at a pace far slower than the plans had provided. The coastal batteries in these sectors were in Allied possession. The road network was under Allied control. The airfield at Blida was neutralized and served no hostile French aircraft for countermeasures such as those near Fedala, Port-Lyautey, and Oran on this same day. The delayed execution of the plans had, however, cost the Eastern Assault Force the benefits of the friendly French action within Algiers during the early morning hours and possible gains from a direct attack on the port by TERMINAL Force.

Operation TERMINAL

Algiers port, like Oran's, was attacked directly by an antisabotage force in the hope of preserving facilities for the very pressing requirements of Allied supply.[14] On two British destroyers, the *Broke* (Lt. Comdr. A. F. C. Layard) and the *Malcolm* (Comdr. A. B. Russell), to which they had transferred on the late afternoon of 7 November from the cruiser *Sheffield,* the men of this special force waited well north of Pointe Pescade for orders that would send them to the assault. In addition to 74 Royal Naval personnel to board and seize ships in Algiers Harbor and 3 British Army officers, the group included 24 American officers and 638 enlisted men from the 3d Battalion, 135th Infantry, U.S. 34th Division.[15] All were in American Army uniform and under command of Lt. Col. Edwin T. Swenson. They had trained briefly for this mission in Belfast Harbor and at a nearby camp but learned its exact nature only during the final stage of the approach voyage from the United Kingdom. Commanding the entire TERMINAL Force was Capt. H. L. St. J. Fancourt (RN).

On receipt of orders from Admiral Burrough, the two vessels started at 0140 for the bay of Algiers, where the lights of the city were visible as they slipped past the eastern shore. The harbor extended along the western edge of the bay more than one and one half miles southward from the Ilot de la Marine. A crescent-shaped sea wall, bowed toward the shore, protected the center of the harbor, while two jetties projecting from shore beyond the sea wall's extremities left sheltered gaps for access to the open bay. Across these two entrances were barrier booms. Jutting out from the shore into the harbor were eight concrete moles of varying lengths and widths which in effect subdivided the entire area into four major basins. At the far north was the section controlled by the French Navy and protected by powerful fixed batteries mounted on the Jetée du Nord. Most of the other three sections were devoted to commercial shipping. On a flat shelf between the base of the moles and the steeply rising slopes of the city were

[14] (1) Operation TERMINAL (Rpt of Capt Fancourt), 11 Nov 42, in App. V to Incl 2 of NCXF, TORCH Despatch. (2) Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations,* II, 207–08. (3) Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch," pp. 29–31. (4) Maj Leslie W. Bailey, The Operations of the 3d Battalion, 135th Infantry, at Algiers, 7 November–10 November 1942, MS (hereafter cited as Bailey, Opns of 3d Bn 135th Inf). The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga. Bailey was a platoon leader in Company I, 135th Infantry.

[15] (1) 135th Inf Hist, Sec. IV, 18 Oct 42–15 May 43, p. 1. (2) App. I to Rpt of The Rear Admiral Commanding, 10th Cruiser Squadron, in Incl 6 (Miscellaneous Reports of Proceedings) of NCXF, TORCH Despatch. Captain Fancourt's report (see n. 14(1) above) describes the TERMINAL forces as 725 U.S. troops and 60 Royal Navy personnel.



ALGIERS, *looking north. (Photograph taken May 1943.)*

paved streets and narrow lanes lined with warehouses and other port structures. The plan of attack called for the *Broke* to pierce the barrier, enter the southern basin, and discharge troops and naval boarding parties at the Quai de Dieppe. About fifteen minutes later, the *Malcolm* was to follow a similar course to the Grand Môle. While a protective cordon was set up barring access by road from the south, teams of platoon strength were to secure an electric power station, a petroleum storage depot, and a seaplane base in the southwestern section of the harbor, and the port offices, graving docks, and adjacent moles farther north. The assignment of missions was flexible, allowing for the possibility of failure by either ship to complete its approach or even for the necessity of withdrawing.[16]

Coastal batteries dominated the bay and harbor not only from the Jetée du Nord and Ilot de la Marine but also from high ground adjacent to the port. In a most advantageous position directly south of the port on the crest of a knoll about 300 feet high was the Batterie des Arcades with three medium guns.[17] Machine gun fire could be expected

[16] Bailey, Opns of 3d Bn 135th Inf, pp. 12–13.

[17] (1) Bailey, Opns of 3d Bn 135th Inf, p. 11, and Map C. (2) Lt Col Ray C. Fountain, U.S. Prov Div G–2 Report, 20 Sep 42. AFHQ G–3 Opns 22/7, Micro Job 10A, Reel 5C.

from other points as well as from these batteries. Against such strength, the attacking force could not expect to benefit from surprise. The landings on the beaches near Algiers would have been in progress more than three hours before the TERMINAL Force could reach the harbor. Plannners deemed it possible that, as an offset against the loss of surprise, some of the port's defenders might be drawn off to oppose the advance from the beaches. The coastal guns, moreover, were understood to be the objective of Commando attacks scheduled to be completed before the harbor was approached.[18] Also, it was possible that the guns could not be sufficiently depressed to strike targets within the harbor itself. Finally, the two ships each flew large American flags and hoped thus to encourage merely token resistance.

As the vessels neared their objective, the admonition not to fire unless previously fired upon ceased to be restraining. The city's lights went out. Searchlight beams swept out across the bay and soon fell on the intruders. Shelling followed at once, particularly from the Batterie des Arcades. In the glare and tumult, both ships twice missed the entrance and then circled for a third try. At that juncture, just after 0400, the *Malcolm* was badly hit, caught fire on deck, and was obliged to withdraw.[19] Casualties were ten killed and twenty-five wounded.[20]

The *Broke* persisted until a fourth try succeeded in taking her at top speed through the barrier "like a knife through butter." Full daylight was still far away as she entered the port. The *Broke* missed the planned point of mooring, either because some anchored vessels barred her path or because she mistook her objective in the darkness, and berthed instead along the Môle Louis Billiard.[21] Half the TERMINAL Force, consisting of Company L, one section of Company M, and nine medical troops of the 135th Infantry, with some British naval personnel, had come safely through the heavy bombardment, flattened on the deck of the *Broke* and sheltered somewhat by her armored rail. They debarked slowly onto the quay at about 0520.[22]

Quickly the various teams scattered on their respective missions. Within a short time, they took possession of the mole itself, the electric power station, and the petroleum tank farm, and began slowly extending northward to the seaplane base and along the street paralleling the shore. Small arms and automatic fire fell on open intersections but was insufficient to stop the advance. The resistance diminished to occasional sniping and soon all sounds of battle gave way to a silence broken principally by the church bells of the city. Naval boarding parties encountered no indications of scuttling or sabotage. At 0800, the attack seemed to have succeeded even without the *Malcolm* and its portion of the TERMINAL Force. What remained was to establish contact with the American troops approaching the city, perhaps already entering its outskirts. Within

[18] Bailey, Opns of 3d Bn 135th Inf, pp. 11–12.

[19] (1) Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch," p. 29. (2) 135th Inf Hist, Sec. IV, 18 Oct 42–15 May 43, p. 2.

[20] H.M.S. *Malcolm* (Rpt of Comdr Russell) in App. V to Incl 2 of NCXF, TORCH Despatch.

[21] (1) Bailey, Opns of 3d Bn 135th Inf, p. 17. (2) H.M.S. *Broke* (Rpt of Comdr Layard) 11 Nov 42, in App. V to Incl 2 of NCXF, TORCH Despatch.

[22] (1) Bailey, Opns of 3d Bn 135th Inf, pp. 10, 12–13. (2) 135th Inf Hist, Sec. IV, 18 Oct 42–15 May 43, p. 2.

a few minutes of each other, a delegation from the city consisting of two civilians and two police officers requested that arrangements be made for the formal surrender of Algiers to the Americans, but a French officer warned that the intruders were being practically surrounded by French troops of wholly hostile intent.[23]

Whatever hesitation in defending the port the French may have had as a result of differences among themselves during the preceding three hours came to an abrupt end about 0800. Artillery fire from the Jetée du Nord drove the *Broke* to another mooring and then to a third—one which was better protected from the line of fire but which separated the ship's party from the elements ashore.[24] While waiting, headed toward the entrance for quicker departure, the *Broke* came under fire from an unseen weapon, probably a howitzer, which at 0920 made several hits or near misses in swift succession.[25] A quick withdrawal had become essential.

The *Broke*'s siren sounded the recall signal and perhaps sixty men near the ship hurried aboard. The main part of Colonel Swenson's force could not have reached her for several minutes, and even then, in their commanding officer's judgment, would have been subject to greater danger than if they remained ashore. Colonel Swenson believed, moreover, that his force could hold out until the 168th Combat Team arrived. He ordered his men to keep their positions. At 0940, the *Broke* struggled out into the bay partially hidden by smoke. The *Zetland* stopped bombarding the Batterie du Lazaret on Cap Matifou to cover the *Broke,* and later took aboard all her passengers, as she towed the *Broke* out to sea.[26]

While six Albacore dive bombers silenced the coastal guns at the northern end of the harbor at about 1100, the determined fire of the Allied troops temporarily subdued the Senegalese companies which hemmed them in. But ammunition had already been running low when several French light tanks and armored cars arrived about 1130 to make the Americans' position hopeless.[27] From the city, no sounds indicated the arrival of the main force, still several miles away. About 1230, therefore, Colonel Swenson surrendered his group. In their jubilation, the port's defenders made no effort to sabotage its installations before the main body of Allied troops should gain the city. The captives were imprisoned for the next two days.[28] Operation TERMINAL at Algiers, like Operation RESERVIST at Oran, had been undertaken in defiance of accepted principles of warfare and had failed, but the conduct of its participants had been gallant and the resistance which overcame them happily lacked the ruthlessness shown by the defenders at Oran.

The Eastern Landings

The assault landings east of Cap Matifou were made by the American 39th Combat

[23] (1) Bailey, Opns of 3d Bn 135th Inf, p. 18. (2) Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch," p. 30.

[24] Captain Fancourt radioed for an air bombing of the menacing battery at 1030 to cover the *Broke*'s prospective withdrawal.

[25] Bailey, Opns of 3d Bn 135th Inf, p. 18.

[26] The *Broke* was so badly damaged that in rough weather next day, she foundered and sank.

[27] 135th Inf Hist, Sec. IV, 18 Oct 42–15 May 43, p. 3.

[28] Losses from TERMINAL Force: British losses were 7 killed, 2 died of wounds, and 18 others wounded on the *Broke;* 4 wounded on the *Malcolm* (Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch," p. 31n.). The 3d Battalion, 135th Infantry, lost 15 killed and 33 wounded (Bailey, Opns of 3d Bn 135th Inf, p. 28).



U.S. TROOPS LANDING NEAR SURCOUF, *8 November 1942.*

Team of 5,688 officers and enlisted men, reinforced by 312 (198 British, 114 American) from the 1st Commando, all under the command of Col. Benjamin F. Caffey, Jr. They were transported by the American combat loaders *Samuel Chase* (the command ship), *Leedstown, Almaack,* and *Exceller,* under escort by three British warships. The senior naval officer, landings was Capt. Campbell D. Edgar (USN). Beach parties and signal sections were American, augmented by British Army beach signal units. More than an hour before midnight, the small convoy established communications with the beacon submarine and hove to some eight miles offshore. The transports had started on this journey from New York Port of Embarkation on 25 September only a short time after most of them had been commissioned. The unfortunate *Thomas Stone* was the best prepared for night amphibious operations.[29] The convoy began its actual assault operations, therefore, under the handicap of inexperience and insufficient training, and under the additional difficulty of last-minute adjustments arising from the loss of the *Thomas Stone.*[30]

In a moderate swell and under a clear sky, with lights ashore undimmed and the piloting party waiting to guide the landing craft formations to the beaches, the disembarkation into the boats began. The difficulties which delayed other combat teams, whether in the Western, Center, or Eastern Task Forces, in getting assault waves in place to start their runs to shore were also experi-

[29] See pp. 62, 187–88 above.

[30] (1) 39th Inf Hist, 23 Oct 42. (2) Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations,* II, 192–93. (3) Lt Col William T. Evans, The Algiers Operation, 8 November–11 November 1942, MS. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga. (4) ETF Opn Order 11, 10 Oct 42.

enced in the Charlie Sector. But energetic action and skillful improvisations overcame those difficulties in time to make the initial touchdowns at about 0130 at all but one point.

The 1st Battalion, 39th Infantry, and supporting units were on the *Samuel Chase;* the 3d Battalion and a detachment of the 1st Commando (five troops only) were on the *Leedstown*. The *Almaack* carried the Headquarters Company and vehicles, most of the drivers of which were on the *Exceller* or scattered on the other ships. The 3d Battalion, originally scheduled for the reserve, was now to undertake the mission for which the luckless 2d Battalion on the *Thomas Stone* had been preparing up to a few hours earlier.

Of four beaches which had been designated in the sector, three were employed. Charlie GREEN extended for about 800 yards, halfway between the villages of Jean-Bart and Aïn Taya. Charlie BLUE, of the same length, lay directly in front of Aïn Taya. RED Beach, subdivided into RED 1 and RED 2, reached from the hamlet of Surcouf, east of Aïn Taya, to the marshy mouth of the Rérhaïa river. The landing schedule, adjusted at a conference of commanders on the *Samuel Chase* to meet prevailing conditions, provided that the 1st Battalion Landing Team should go to Charlie BLUE, and Commandos and the 3d Battalion Landing Team should go to Charlie GREEN, and service units and vehicles should use Charlie RED, the only one which had easy access to the interior.[31] The others were faced by an almost vertical bluff with stairs for pedestrians but with no good exits for vehicles.

As the assault waves were nearing the beaches, two ships of the slower convoy with matériel for the easternmost landings arrived in the transport area, and, since no opposition appeared to be coming from ashore, Captain Edgar ordered all his transports to proceed closer to the beaches. About 0130, they started to positions only 4,000 yards out. More than an hour later the battery on Cap Matifou was roused. Even before Captain Edgar had received a report from the beachmaster, he heard a broadcast from Washington announcing that the landings under his command had been successfully accomplished.[32]

Searchlights on Cap Matifou swept over the area, illuminating not only the transports but the British destroyers, *Cowdray* and *Zetland*. The four big guns of the Batterie du Lazaret directed several shells toward the destroyers, which fired in return, dousing the light and forcing the battery to suspend fire.[33]

The westernmost landings in the Charlie Sector were the last to be made, for the Commandos in eleven LCP's, guided by a pilot aboard one of these boats, after a late start from the vicinity of the *Leedstown* ran into an offshore fog bank, slowed down to enable the formation to keep together more closely, and completed their run to GREEN Beach about two hours behind schedule.

The first waves of infantry from the *Samuel Chase,* and the service units from the *Almaack,* bound for BLUE and RED Beaches, were expected to leave together at the same time as the Commandos. They were to have a motor launch and pilot at both outside

[31] (1) ETF Opn Order 12, p. 2. (2) App. IV (Rpt of R.N. Beach and Pilotage Party, 8 Dec 42) to Incl 2 of NCXF, TORCH Despatch.

[32] SNOL Charlie Action Rpt, 12 Nov 42. AFHQ AG 370.2, Micro Job 24, Reel 79D.

[33] (1) *Ibid.* (2) Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations,* II, 198–99. The time of this engagement with the battery is set at about 0230 by Captain Edgar.

front positions, and to remain together for the first six miles until they arrived at an offshore obstacle and landmark, the Bordelaise Rock. The last 2,000 yards would find the two groups diverging to their respective objectives. Unfortunately for the execution of this plan, the navigators of the landing craft going to RED Beach failed to swing southeastward at the rock and continued instead to BLUE Beach.[34] A few boats bound for GREEN Beach from the *Leedstown* also strayed into the BLUE Beach area. Yet in the absence of resistance, it was possible for the units to straighten out the situation quickly. The 1st Battalion Landing Team (Lt. Col. A. H. Rosenfeld) at Aïn Taya was beginning to reorganize by 0130, and the 3d Battalion Landing Team (Maj. Farrar O. Griggs) nearer Jean-Bart was about fifteen minutes later in preparing for its inland advance.[35]

The Commando troops under command of Maj. K. R. S. Trevor (Br.) moved westward along the coastal road. Detachments soon controlled three important objectives: Jean-Bart, a signal station and barracks near Fort d'Estrées, and the approaches to the Batterie du Lazaret. The battery and fort declined to surrender or to accept a truce, and proved too strong to be taken by assault with the means available. A request was made, therefore, for heavy supporting naval gunfire.[36]

The 3d Battalion, 39th Infantry, was expected to move by the coastal road to Fort de l'Eau, Maison Carrée, and Husseïn Dey. Here it was to seize a small airfield and subsequently establish contact with the Allied forces approaching Algiers from the west, with the special detachment which was to have stormed Algiers Harbor, and with the friendly French who were to have gained control of the city.[37] A march of approximately six miles brought the 3d Battalion to the resort village of Fort de l'Eau, where French troops disputed its further westward progress. Three French tanks supporting the infantry there damaged some American trucks, threatened to strike the battalion on the flank, and brought the advance toward Algiers to a stop.[38]

The 1st Battalion, 39th Infantry, had the vital mission of seizing the Maison Blanche airdrome before daylight. Beach conditions immobilized the newly landed antitank guns and 105-mm. howitzers, but advance elements set off without them. The battalion made an expeditious approach march by road for most of the ten miles to the airfield, arriving at its objective at approximately 0615.[39] A few French tanks, against which the attacking force had no suitable weapons, were encountered as the battalion neared the airfield, but after they had fired briefly as if in merely token resistance, they withdrew while the American troops occupied the airfield. Negotiations for its surrender were completed by 0830.[40] Fog over the airdrome was too thick to permit immediate use by Royal Air Force units, but the 43d

[34] Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch," p. 28.
[35] 39th Inf Hist, 23 Oct 43.
[36] Interv with Brig Gen Benjamin F. Caffey, Jr. (USA, Ret.), 21 Feb 50.
[37] EAF FO 1.
[38] Rad 1305/8, SNO ETF to Rear Adm Aircraft Spare Force 1, Flag Officer H, and 10th Cruiser Squadron, 8 Nov 42; Rad 1306/8, G-2 EAF to AFCP Gibraltar, 8 Nov 42. AFHQ G-3 Ops 22/5, Micro Job 10A, Reel 5C.
[39] 39th Inf Hist, 23 Oct 43.
[40] (1) Rad 1352, CG EAF to AFCP, 8 Nov 42. AFHQ G-3 Ops 22/5, Micro Job 10A Reel 5C. (2) Maj George S. Bare, The Algiers Operation, 8 November–11 November 1942, MS, pp. 18–19. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga. This cites the personal knowledge of the battalion commanding officer, Colonel Rosenfeld. (3) CT 39 AAR.

Squadron (eighteen Hurricanes) was reported in at 1035, with two other units then summoned arriving during the afternoon. The main problem in using the field was to obtain fuel and maintenance, but enough fuel was found to get some of the aircraft aloft over Algiers and Cap Matifou before sunset.[41]

Capture of the field proved far less advantageous than had been anticipated, for vehicles, supplies, and ground crews for the Royal Air Force squadrons, brought to the sector on the cargo ships *Dempo, Macharda, Maron,* and *Ocean Rider*, had met with ill fortune. The high swell and surf through which the landings of the assault troops were made demanded a proficiency in small-boat navigation exceeding that of most of the half-trained crews assigned to that duty. As the craft piled up on the beaches, or swamped offshore, the rate of debarkation by later serials slowed down sharply. The weather, moreover, deteriorated during the day, also helping to prevent aviation supplies sorely required at Maison Blanche from being landed. The carrier aircraft continued to furnish almost all air support on D Day and to defend the port.[42] The defense of the airfield was entrusted to Company A, 39th Infantry, reinforced by an extra machine gun platoon from Company D and by a section of 81-mm. mortars, while the remainder of the 1st Battalion occupied an area north and northeast of the field.[43]

While the approach to the city from the east was being held up on Cap Matifou and at the village of Fort de l'Eau, and while rough water was destroying more and more landing craft, slowing down the movement of men and supplies from ship to shore to a mere trickle, efforts were made to break the deadlock at the Batterie du Lazaret. The request for naval gunfire in support of the Commando troops on Cap Matifou brought at 1040 a bombardment from H.M.S. *Zetland* which continued for an hour but which proved insufficient to produce surrender.[44] A combined air and naval bombardment was therefore delivered early in the afternoon. While the Commandos pulled back a second time, the cruiser *Bermuda* and a flight of Albacore dive bombers from the carrier *Formidable* struck the area under attack for more than an hour, commencing about 1430. After 1600, the Commandos, supported by one self-propelled 105-mm. howitzer, renewed their attack on the battery. Some fifty French marines surrendered at 1700. Reinforced by two armored cars, the Commandos went on to attack Fort d'Estrées about half an hour later, but without success. At 2000, the attack was broken off. The Commandos withdrew to the south for the remainder of the night.[45]

Axis bombers arrived at dusk to hinder Allied progress toward the seizure of Algiers. One small flight demonstrated without serious effect near Algiers, and another achieved a preliminary success on the eastern side of Cap Matifou against the ships

[41] (1) Rad Blue 260, CG EAF to AFCP Gibraltar, 8 Nov 42. AFHQ G–3 Ops 22/5, Micro Job 10A, Reel 5C. (2) The other two squadrons were the 81st and 82d Squadrons (Spitfires). Info supplied by Air Ministry, London.

[42] (1) NC ETF Opn Order 11, 10 Oct 42. (2) SNOL Charlie Action Rpt, 12 Nov 42. AFHQ AG 370.2, Micro Job 24, Reel 79D. (3) Rad, SNO ETF to NCXF, 8 Nov 42. AFHQ G–3 Ops 22/5, Micro Job 10A, Reel 5C. (4) App. VIII to Rpt of *Avenger* in App. V to Incl 2 of NCXF, TORCH Despatch.

[43] CT 39 AAR.

[44] Msg, SNO ETF to NCXF, 8 Nov 42. Copy printed in Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch," p. 97.

[45] (1) Interv with Gen Caffey, 21 Feb 50, who believes that the fort also surrendered before morning. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

anchored off Charlie Sector. They severely damaged the destroyer *Cowdray* and immobilized the transport *Leedstown* with a hit astern. After narrow escapes other vessels shifted next morning to the bay of Algiers for unloading in Algiers Harbor. The *Leedstown* was left behind, a setup for return visits on 9 November, when two afternoon attacks forced its abandonment. U.S. Navy losses on the ship were eight dead and fourteen wounded. Army personnel also suffered casualties while trying, with the assistance of those already on the beach, to reach land through surf and undertow.[46]

Negotiations in Algiers

Algiers came under control of the irregulars of the French resistance at the time the landings began and remained so for several hours of increasing danger and anxiety. About half an hour after midnight, they began putting into execution their long-matured plans. Organized parties occupied the major centers from which opposition to the landings might otherwise have been directed. They stopped most telephone service except over the police system. At the police headquarters and outlying stations, they gained control, locked up top officials, and issued instructions favorable to their purposes. They took possession of the Algiers radio station and prepared to broadcast an appeal in the name of General Giraud. Guides went to the expected points of landing and prepared to expedite the arrival at the city itself of enough American troops to take over and hold control. Temporarily they immobilized the Algiers garrison. Although not all the plans were executed, the anti-Vichy organization in the main discharged its part of the operation effectively. The pro-Allied French were in control by 0130; they held the city not only for the two hours which they had foreseen but until 0700, the very latest time believed possible in the planning phase.

At 0700, General Giraud had not arrived. An appeal was broadcast by his adherents as if from him. At 0700, no American troop units had come into Algiers. The insurrectionist patriots began to lose control of the centers which they had been holding and resorted to various improvised stratagems to hinder organized opposition to the slow Allied approach. Some sniping occurred from upper windows on groups in the streets. One officer of great zeal and courage was killed. Long before the city was yielded to the armed invaders, the tables had been turned on General Mast's associates, many of whom were locked up and some of whom were dead. The Allies eventually received control of the city from its regular defenders.

While the pro-Allied French began their part of the operation inside Algiers, Mr. Robert Murphy and his colleagues proceeded with theirs. The first waves of troops had already started toward the beaches when Murphy called on General Juin at his official residence in Lambiridi.[47] The convoys which General Juin knew to be crossing the Mediterranean were, Mr. Murphy at last revealed, about to disembark an overwhelming force at Algiers. They had come, he explained, to assist France in achieving her liberation, acting on the invitation of General Giraud. General Juin, he hoped,

[46] (1) Br. Battle Sum 38, Opn "Torch," p. 31. (2) Morison, *U.S. Naval Operations*, II, 212–14. (3) Memo with incls, Chief Bureau of Personnel USN for Chief Hist Div Spec Staff U.S. Army, 31 Mar 50, sub: Naval casualties during North African occupation 8 Nov 42–9 Jul 43. OCMH. (4) Interv with Gen Caffey, 21 Feb 50.

[47] Mr. Murphy's Notes reporting the events of the evening appear in Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, pp. 345–49.

would co-operate by issuing all instructions necessary to prevent resistance, and join in a friendly reception. Only four days earlier, General Juin had warned Mr. Murphy that he was under orders to resist an attempt by any force to seize French North Africa.[48] Now he was asked to recognize that General Giraud's leadership might supersede the authority which had hitherto controlled him. He therefore took the understandable position that this American invitation should be submitted without delay to the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of Vichy France, Admiral Darlan, from whom a change of orders might indeed be obtained. Such a step was feasible because Admiral Darlan was then in Algiers.

Wherever Darlan might be when the American proposal was received, he could not escape making a choice, and that it should be presented to him in Algiers rather than in Vichy was a circumstance advantageous to the Allies. He was there with his wife attending his son, Alain, in what was believed to be the last stage of a fatal illness. That a man occupying Darlan's position should remain rather secretly in Algiers while Allied forces crossed the Mediterranean to occupy the city was a coincidence fraught with such impressive consequences that it has been attributed to premeditation and prearrangement. The evidence concerning Darlan's knowledge of what was impending and his intentions may not be conclusive, but it does indicate that he was caught by surprise and was exasperated that he had not been forewarned.

About twenty minutes after being notified that Mr. Murphy had an urgent message for him, Darlan was brought to General Juin's villa, where he was apprised of the situation immediately. After getting over his first irritation, he recognized that it was up to him to decide whether French North Africa should pass into the hands of the Allies with or without bloodshed. German reprisals elsewhere in North Africa, and in France were certain if Vichy were implicated in the Allied occupation. He was reminded by Mr. Murphy that he had previously expressed to Admiral Leahy, the U.S. Ambassador in Vichy, his willingness to consider collaboration against the Axis when the Allies could come to him with 500,000 American soldiers, fully equipped, and with tanks and planes in quantity. Those forces were now approaching. The time for his decision had arrived.

The facts justifying such an irrevocable French commitment remained to be ascertained beyond all doubt. Darlan had only Mr. Murphy's word; no reports had come as yet from French observers. While temporizing, the admiral emphasized his obligations to Marshal Pétain. At Mr. Murphy's suggestion, he drafted a radio message to his Chief of State reporting the situation, and remained temporarily under house arrest. While a reply was being awaited, the cordon of pro-Allied guards surrounding General Juin's villa was expelled by *gardes mobiles.* Murphy himself became the prisoner there while Darlan and Juin then went to Fort l'Empereur to determine a future course. Juin set about regaining control where possible. General Koeltz was freed from arrest. Passive acceptance of the invaders began to give way to moderate resistance as Koeltz relieved Mast of his command over the Algiers Division.

Hostilities Cease in Algiers

In Vichy, just after 0900, 8 November 1942, Marshall Pétain received the Ameri-

[48] Msg, AGWAR to USFOR, 5 Nov 42, CM-OUT 1343.

can Chargé d'Affaires, Mr. S. Pinkney Tuck, who brought the President's official message. The reply, already prepared, was then signed by the Marshal and handed to his visitor. The French would resist this attack upon the French empire. At the conclusion of the interview, when Mr. Tuck rose to leave, Marshal Pétain showed the greatest amiability and good spirits.[49] Later in the day, the chargé d'affaires was informed that diplomatic relations with the government of the United States were broken.[50] Marshal Pétain replied to Admiral Darlan's report from Algiers with an authorization to act freely in the Marshal's behalf, reporting what had been done.[51] While Darlan postponed decisive steps, the Eastern Assault Force closed in, preparing to surround the city. General Ryder, who left the *Bulolo* about 0900 to join the advance echelon of his headquarters at Beach Beer WHITE under Brig. Gen. Ray E. Porter, could by 1600 consider that success was impending. His troops held the heights west of Algiers, the highways approaching the city from west and east, the airfields at Blida and Maison Blanche, and the principal coastal batteries from Cap Sidi Ferruch to Ilot de la Marine at Algiers Harbor. Naval gunfire on the Batterie du Lazaret on Cap Matifou and artillery shelling of Fort l'Empereur were certain indications of the ultimate destruction of each. British Albacore dive bombers had already struck the Jetée du Nord, Fort Duperré, and Fort d'Estrées. Fort Duperré was ready to capitulate. Fort d'Estrées was holding out. The city was now well on the way to being surrounded, giving Darlan, Juin, and the other French leaders the choice of waiting to be captured or marching out with such forces as they could extricate. The Eastern Assault Force had fallen far behind its schedule and was logistically none too firmly established ashore, but it was there to stay. Such was the situation when, shortly after 1600, General Ryder learned from one of Robert Murphy's staff that General Juin was ready to negotiate. Darlan had authorized him to arrange a settlement for Algiers but not for all French North Africa.[52]



MAJ. GEN. CHARLES S. RYDER.
(Photograph taken in 1948.)

The arrangements by which hostilities in Algiers came to an end began with a brief face-to-face encounter by Generals Ryder and Juin. They met in Juin's headquarters

[49] Msg, S. Pinkney Tuck to Secy of State Cordell Hull, 8 Nov 42. Copy in OPD Exec 5, Vol. VI.

[50] Phone conv, Tuck and Atherton State Dept, 11:30 P.M., 8 Nov 42. Copy in OPD Exec 5, Vol. VI.

[51] The text of Darlan's message to Pétain, and Pétain's reply, are given in Kammerer, *Du débarquement Africain au meurtre de Darlan*, pp. 262, 267.

[52] Interv with Gen Ryder, 18 Mar 49.

in Fort l'Empereur, to which Ryder was brought with two other American officers in Juin's own automobile after passing through the lines in Lambiridi to find the fort. The two men at 1840, 8 November, concluded a simple oral agreement to stop fighting at once and to transfer control of the city to the Americans at 2000. The French troops would return to their barracks, retaining their arms and colors. Americans would occupy key points in the city and rely on the aid of French police to maintain order. Detailed armistice terms would be the subject of discussion at a meeting to be held next morning. While these informal arrangements were being put into effect, General Ryder returned to the *Bulolo* and reported them to Gibraltar, recommending that he be permitted to arrange an armistice on the basis of the mild terms prepared, during the planning, for a case of merely token resistance.

General Juin had been restricted by Darlan's authorization to an agreement covering Algiers only. Elsewhere in Algeria French troops were ordered to resist any non-French forces which attacked them. Ryder wished to extend the pacification throughout Algeria, while Murphy, on behalf of General Eisenhower, was trying to procure Darlan's order stopping hostilities in all French North Africa. A conference with the French leaders at the Hotel St. Georges at 2000 prepared the way for General Clark's negotiations as soon as he should arrive; at the same time Admiral Darlan consented to the use of Algiers Harbor at first light, 9 November, for sheltering the Eastern Naval Task Force.[53]

General Ryder met the French chiefs once more in conference during the next afternoon. Although he had not yet received from Allied Force advance headquarters at Gibraltar any reply to his recommendation of the previous afternoon that he conclude an armistice on easy terms, he decided to offer those terms on his own responsibility. They were accepted provisionally, subject to approval from Marshal Pétain—an approval which could not be promised before one more day. Meanwhile the French troops in Algiers were assembled in barracks and left in possession of their arms. General Ryder's only safeguard for his forces was the promise of the French leaders that they would not resume hostilities without warning. General Ryder insisted upon supplementing this limitation by discreetly gathering up their ammunition and placing it under American guards, pending a lasting basis of association. At this juncture, the situation changed materially. Arrangements concerning Algiers became subordinated to negotiations for a general cease-fire order for Oran and Morocco, and for French resistance to the Axis forces arriving in Tunisia. On the evening of 9 November, Lt. Gen. Kenneth A. N. Anderson (Br.) arrived at Blida, went to the *Bulolo*, and assumed command of the Eastern Task Force for the drive on Tunis. At almost the same time General Clark arrived to lead the negotiations with Darlan, Juin, and others. General Giraud also appeared at Algiers, with the approbation of the Allied high command, to rally French patriots who were prepared to resume hostilities against the Axis powers. While fighting continued at Oran and in western Morocco, in Algiers it was in abeyance.[54]

[53] (1) *Ibid.* (2) Kammerer, *Du débarquement Africain au meurtre de Darlan*, pp. 278, 280. (3) Richard and Serigny, *L'énigme d'Alger*, Annex IV, pp. 266–68.

[54] Richard and Serigny, *L'énigme d'Alger*, Annex V, pp. 270–76.

CHAPTER XIV

The Axis Reaction and the French Decision

The future course of the French forces in Northwest Africa was decided during the week which followed the Allied arrival. On 10 November 1942, the immediate needs of the Allied command, if it was to win the race for Tunisia, were a prompt decision by the French to terminate hostilities still prevailing at Oran and in western Morocco, and measures to prevent the Axis from gaining a bridgehead in Tunisia. Time was so precious that, despite uncertainty whether the French would continue to resist, submit to invasion, or actively assist the Allies, the Eastern Task Force, under General Anderson's command, began its scheduled operation. It started advancing toward Tunisia by land, sea, and air, accepting the risks of a line of supply which might become highly insecure if the negotiations then in progress should turn out badly for the Allies.

The French leaders conferred with Allied representatives at Algiers and with Axis representatives in Tunis, at Vichy, and at Munich, where Hitler himself saw Pierre Laval. At Algiers the Allied negotiators sought to persuade the French that the time had come to join forces with the Allies in order to liberate France in conformity with Allied grand strategy. But it was too much to expect of the French authorities, given the complexities of the situation in which they found themselves, that, even if so disposed, they could make an immediate decision in Algiers favorable to the Allied plan of action. They could expect retaliatory action by the Axis in continental France which would almost certainly include seizure of the unoccupied zone. They therefore had to make at least a show of discharging France's obligation, under the terms of the Franco-German armistice of 1940, to defend the African territories against Allied invasion. For the same reason they had to refer the Allied armistice proposals to the Vichy government. Furthermore, since the unity of French forces in Africa was essential, and since the bulk of these forces was loyal to an oath taken to Marshal Pétain, the military leaders in Algiers felt compelled to act at least nominally, and perhaps actually, with Pétain's approval. Finally, both they and the Allied command were faced with the political fact that deeply embedded antipathies and distrusts divided the French, complicating the relations between them and the non-European inhabitants of French North Africa, and strongly influencing the life of all segments of the population. The Allies were not prepared to control this population except through the French. The first task of the Allied command was to effect the association of a military and political

group among the French leaders which could take necessary measures with timely adroitness. Allied pressure for such a basis of Allied-French co-operation mounted with each day of negotiation.

Aside from the threat of Axis retaliation, what the French would do was dependent not only on what the Allies offered but on what the Germans and Italians were prepared to provide. Pétain's weak government in Vichy had to choose between passive neutrality and active collaboration with the Axis powers just as the regime in French North Africa had to choose between passive neutrality and active association with the Allied coalition. Control over Tunisia was as vital to the Axis powers as it was to the Allies. Hitler and Mussolini were even more eager than the Allies to gain the use of the French warships in support of the Axis cause. What could the Germans do?

Axis Efforts To Gain French Co-operation

For a time after the Allied landings, the Axis leaders hoped for immediate active collaboration by the Vichy government, a relationship which would make available the French fleet based at Toulon, the essential ports of Bizerte and Tunis, and landing fields for the Luftwaffe perhaps as far west as Constantine. German military support, primarily air, was immediately offered to Vichy and accepted with the stipulation that the German planes operate from bases in Sicily and Sardinia. Kesselring was directed to give aid to the French in their fight in North Africa and soon planes were made ready to attack the Eastern Naval Task Force at Algiers, a strike which took place on 8 November at dusk. At the same time, the German Navy began preparations to send to Tunisia the *3d "S" Boat Flotilla* based in Sicily.[1]

To establish liaison between Darlan and the Axis air forces in North Africa, a German officer, identified as a Captain Schuermeyer, started for Algiers by air on the afternoon of 8 November. When he landed at Sétif in eastern Algeria late in the day, he found the intelligence from Algiers so unpromising that he went instead to Tunis, where he sought out General Barré. Barré had been put in command of the Eastern Defense Sector by Darlan's order late that afternoon. In conformity with the standing orders for the defense of Tunis and eastern Algeria, he had disposed his troops in six *groupements* and issued orders to obstruct the entrance to the ports at Bizerte, Tunis, Sousse, and Sfax.

Ostensibly to make the proffered air support more effective, the Germans during the day demanded and received permission from Vichy to dispatch two liaison officers from Germany to Darlan and Estéva, and to send their air reinforcements via unoccupied France. The German demanded with increasing insistence the use of airports in Tunisia and the Department of Constantine as bases.

Vichy's concessions did not allay Hitler's chronic distrust, which the French deepened by not accepting at once his offer of an out-and-out military alliance against the Allies. To determine the French stand, Hitler on the morning of 9 November summoned Premier Pierre Laval to Munich for a con-

[1] (1) Kammerer, *Du débarquement Africain au meurtre de Darlan*, pp. 286, 301. (2) *SKL/1.Abt. KTB, Teil A, 1.–30.XI.42*, 8 Nov 42.

ference, and gave a somewhat politer invitation to the Italian allies.[2]

While the Germans were edging their way into Tunisia, the Italians were busily preparing to move into Corsica and to share in exploiting the concessions wrung from the French regarding North Africa. Marshal Cavallero initially opposed Italian participation in a Tunisian expedition, but by the evening of 8 November Axis preparations were in full swing to ship to Tunisia on 10 November ground troops, primarily Italians, supported only by such German specialized units as were immediately available in Italy. Kesselring also arranged to divert to Tunisia three or four of the heavy, newly developed 88-mm. antiaircraft guns intended for Rommel's army.[3]

Early on 9 November the Vichy government informed the Germans that French air bases in Tunisia and in the Department of Constantine were available to the Luftwaffe. Later in the morning the French qualified this concession by insisting that only German forces, no Italians, be sent to Tunisia. This French condition was reiterated at noon by Admiral Estéva, the Resident General, who reported to Vichy that two German liaison officers had arrived in Tunisia, accredited by Kesselring to Darlan, and bearing orders to arrange for the collaboration of German and Italian air units with the French defenders of North Africa. Estéva protested to Vichy against this collaboration and particularly against the use of any Italian forces. Even before this message could be sent the first German planes were landing, and until darkness fighters, dive bombers, and air transports kept arriving at El Aouina airdrome, near Tunis. They brought German paratroopers and Kesselring's headquarters guard to protect the landing ground. French troops ringed the field and kept the Germans there. But General der Flieger Bruno Loerzer, commanding general of *II. Fliegerkorps* in Sicily, was driven through the cordon on a special visit to Admiral Estéva to obtain his guarantee of at least a passive French reception of German forces, wherever in Tunisia they arrived.[4]

On the same evening, 9 November, Ciano arrived in Munich as Mussolini's representative. Hitler received him immediately and together they reviewed the situation created by the Allied landings in Morocco and Algeria. Hitler believed that "the Americans" would try to invade Tunisia by land; therefore the Axis must secure an earlier hold there. The French, he said, had demanded that only German units should be sent into Tunisia, a proposal that was tantamount to refusing his demands, since Germany lacked sufficient matériel or manpower to meet

[2] (1) *Generalkommando XC. Armee Korps, Kriegstagebuch I* (hereafter cited as *XC Corps, KTB I*), *16.–30.XI.42,* p. 1. (2) Journal de Marche du Commandement Supérieur des Troupes de Tunisie (hereafter cited as CSTT Jnl), 8 Nov 42. (See Note on Sources.) (3) Kammerer, *Du débarquement Africain an meurtre de Darlan,* pp. 303–06, 365, 670. (4) Otto Abetz, *Das offene Problem* (Cologne, 1951), p. 246. (5) Hugh Gibson, ed., *The Ciano Diaries, 1939–1943* (New York, 1946), p. 451. (Hereafter cited as *Ciano Diaries.*)

[3] (1) Cavallero, *Comando Supremo,* pp. 370–72, 376–79. (2) *Deutsches Marinekommando Italien, Kriegstagebuch des Befehlshabers* (hereinafter cited as *Marinekdo. Italien, KTB*), *1.15.XI.42,* 8 Nov 42.

[4] (1) Kammerer, *Du débarquement Africain au meurte de Darlan,* pp. 306, 307, 359–61. (2) MS # D–040, *Verhandlung mit dem Stellvertreter von General Barré und dem Residenten von Tunis Admiral Estéva* (Generaloberst Bruno Loerzer). (3) MS # D–067, *Die Beauftragung des OB Sued mit der zusaetzlichen Kampffuehrung in Nord-Afrika nach der alliierten Landung* (General der Flieger Paul Deichmann).

these and other needs. Hitler intended to discover what Laval had to offer, but he had already sent to Tunisia two Stuka groups and one fighter group. Soon small German ground units would follow. If he could rush a few troops into Tunis in this fashion, stronger forces could come in later and improve the Axis position. By midnight 10–11 November, the German concentration on the borders of unoccupied France would be complete; if the French had failed him, the invasion would proceed at once. Ciano reported that the Italian position in these matters was the same as the German; Italian forces would be ready to occupy part of Southern France and to seize Corsica. Hitler remarked that the Axis position in Tunisia could be upheld only if a convoy could land heavy equipment, including some heavy tanks (Tigers) which were then on their way to Italy.[5]

The Vichy government received with some misgivings, no doubt, professions by the Germans that their operations in Tunisia were designed to help the French to preserve control of their northwest African territories; they could hardly reconcile these explanations with Axis actions. Vichy representatives in Wiesbaden were assured by the German Armistice Commission on 9 November, for example, that the covetous Italians for the time being would not be permitted to establish military forces in Tunisia. But the Italian Air Force held fighter units in readiness for action there while the Germans were courting Vichy and the Tunisian authorities; on the morning of 10 November, the Italians finally sent a flight of twenty-eight *Macchi 202* fighters.[6]

In a short conference later on the morning of 10 November, Ciano informed Hitler that the first Italian planes had arrived in Tunisia, and he proposed that, in view of the latest reports from North Africa, the Italians be allowed to occupy Corsica. Hitler agreed to this proposal and Mussolini was immediately notified.

On the afternoon of 10 November Hitler, Ciano, and Laval conferred. After Hitler and Laval had reviewed the course of German-French relations since 1940, Hitler posed the question: would France now make the ports of Tunis and Bizerte and all Tunisian air bases available to the Axis powers? If not, collaboration was at an end. Hitler demanded a definite answer from Laval. Laval nonetheless avoided the issue, saying that only Pétain could make such a decision. When he reminded Hitler that the French could not agree to Italian participation in the Axis occupation of Tunisia, Hitler answered that Germany and Italy were allies, and that France would have to accept this fact and allow troop units of both nations to enter.[7] Soon after this fruitless conference, orders went out to Axis forces to occupy Vichy France on the next morn-

[5] *Aufzeichnung ueber die Unterredung zwischen dem Fuehrer und dem Grafen Ciano in Anwesenheit des Reichsmarschalls, und des Reichsaussenministers im Fuehrerbau in Muenchen am 9. November 1942* (Memo by Dr. Paul Schmidt). German Foreign Ministry Archives.

[6] (1) Kammerer, *Du débarquement Africain au meurtre de Darlan*, p. 365. (2) Cavallero, *Comando Supremo*, pp. 379–83.

[7] (1) *Aufzeichnung ueber die Unterredung zwischen dem Fuehrer und dem Grafen Ciano in Anwesenheit des Reichsmarschalls, und des Reichsaussenministers im Fuehrebau in Muenchen am 10. November 1942* (Memo by Dr. Paul Schmidt). German Foreign Ministry Archives. (2) *Aufzeichnung ueber die Unterredung zwischen dem Fuehrer, dem Grafen Ciano und Ministerpraesident Laval in Anwesenheit des RAM im Fuehrerbau in Muenchen am Nachmittag des 10. November 1942* (Memo by Dr. Paul Schmidt). German Foreign Ministry Archives.

ing, and a formal directive was issued for the occupation of Tunisia.[8]

The policy of the Axis in Tunisia, as formulated by 11 November, was to bring in a strong military force in the ostensible role of protector of the French. To give the operation as German a character as possible, all Axis forces in Tunisia were to be under German control. The German field commander in Tunis, Colonel Harlinghausen of the Luftwaffe, soon to be replaced by an Army officer, was responsible to the Commander in Chief South, who was given complete command of the Tunisian bridgehead. Because of the limited forces available, this bridgehead was to be established on defensible terrain having the shortest practicable line, one as far inland from the main supply ports as Axis forces could maintain. Friendly relations with the French command in Tunisia were to be cultivated. The Tunis Division would be disarmed in case its sympathies were doubtful, and its weapons used by German troops and, if necessary, by recruits from the Italian population of Tunisia. The French fleet was to be held at its base in Toulon while Axis submarines and bombing planes struck the Allied landing forces. All available sea and air transport was temporarily to be diverted from supplying Rommel's army in order to rush new Axis units to Tunisia.[9]

Allied retaliation against the privileged treatment of the Germans in Tunisia took the form of deterrent air strikes from Malta against the German aircraft at the airdrome near Tunis and the airlift from Sicily. The first of these raids was an attack on 10 November on El Aouina airdrome of Tunis by nine planes of the 272d Squadron, Royal Air Force, with considerable though temporary effect.[10]

The Germans rendered French acceptance of the fiction of German friendliness completely impossible by violating the original armistice terms restricting German military control to northern France. At midnight, 10–11 November, they began to penetrate the previously unoccupied portion of metropolitan France in accordance with plans brought up to date during the preceding summer.[11] With motorized units in the lead, a total of more than ten divisions, two of which were armored, swept across southern France without meeting resistance.[12] At the same time six Italian divisions marched into eastern France. The Vichy government was completely submerged by the Axis; it merely uttered feeble protests, and countenanced the anti-Axis French action in North Africa only by highly secret and rather vague communications from Marshal Pétain to Admiral Darlan. The French Navy remained at the base in Toulon under close surveillance, the object of covetous attention from both Allied and Axis leaders.

Even after Axis occupations of the free zone and of Corsica, Axis troops and equipment pouring into Tunisia met no French resistance. Ground troops arrived daily by air and, beginning on 12 November, at fre-

[8] *SKL/1.Abt, KTB, Teil A, 1.–30.XI.42,* 10 and 11 Nov 42.

[9] *SKL/1.Abt, KTB, Teil A, 1.–30.XI.42,* 10 Nov 42.

[10] Info supplied by Air Ministry, London.

[11] This was Operation *ANTON* (formerly *ATTILA*). German *First Army's* plans approved by *OB West* on 15 August 1942 involved the employment of formations from both *First Army* and *Army Group Felber. Army Group Felber* was the designation used for *Headquarters XLV Corps* for deception purposes.

[12] (1) *Armeeoberkommando 7, KTB, IX.–XII.42,* and *Anlagen.* (2) *Armeeoberkommando 1, KTB, 10.VII–31.XII.42,* and *Anlagen.* (3) *Hoeheres Kommando XLV (Army Group Felber), Korpsbefehle, 22.III.40–29.IX.42.*

quent intervals by sea. The long and prodigious airlift begun on 9 November was to carry a total of 15,273 officers and enlisted men, and 581 tons of supplies by the end of the month.[13] The transport vessels *Catarina Costa* and *Città di Napoli* arrived at Bizerte on the evening of 12 November with 340 men, 17 tanks, 4 guns, 55 trucks, 40 tons of ammunition, and 101 tons of fuel, a small beginning in the prolonged struggle to supply the Axis forces in the Tunisian bridgehead. By the end of November, 20 officers, 1,847 enlisted men, 159 tanks and armored cars, 127 guns, 1,097 vehicles, and 12,549 tons of supplies, comprising twenty-eight shiploads, were brought over.[14]

Axis use of the ports of Tunis and Bizerte was made difficult by the actions of General Barré and Admiral Louis Derrien, commanding officer of the French naval forces in Tunisia and sector commander of all French forces in Bizerte. Both of these ports were blocked and their full use denied the Axis by sinking vessels in the harbor approaches. But these measures did not delay the Germans and Italians for long. With the aid of special Italian port engineers Bizerte was clear for use by 12 November, and Tunis by 15 November 1942. Thus the entrance to Bizerte was no longer blocked when the Italian transports approached. General Barré, at this point faced with a *fait accompli,* authorized German use of the Sidi Ahmed airfield near Bizerte as well as the port, in order to postpone a clash at arms.[15]

The position of the Germans in Tunisia remained for a time weak and uncertain. They found it exceedingly difficult to ascertain what the French in that area would do when the Allies and the Axis actually came to grips. The French authorities were themselves subject to a series of highly confusing instructions. At first they adopted the position of total defense against all adversaries. Next they accepted Axis planes and airborne troops. Then they were instructed from Algiers on 10 November, after Admiral Darlan's first armistice agreement, not to resist the Anglo-Americans either. The next day, following telephoned instructions from Algiers, they were ordered to resist any Axis ships or landing forces but not airplanes unless they engaged in hostile acts, and not to resist any Allied ground, sea, or air forces. By midnight, authority of the leaders in Algiers was discredited by broadcasts from Vichy, and the policy became that of passive neutrality toward all foreign forces. Such passivity permitted the Axis build-up in Tunisia by air and sea to continue, and made certain that eventually French troops would have to retire from the area of combat or even to disband, or what was far more likely, to adhere to one side or the other in the forthcoming engagements.[16]

The movements of General Barré's Tunis Division were perplexing to Axis leaders. He had first been ordered from Algiers to dispose his troops, as well as others in the Constantine area who went under his command, in such a manner as to be able to defend Tunisia from all sides. Contrary orders from Vichy led him to remain passively neutral while the Germans and Italians began arriving. Instructions simply to segregate his

[13] *Panzer-Armeeoberkommando 5* (hereafter cited as *Fifth Panzer Army*), *Abt Qu 3—Oberquartiermeister Tunis, Taetigkeitsbericht, 15.XI.–31.XII.42.*

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] (1) CSTT Jnl, 11–13 Nov 42. (2) His own explanation is to be found in Général Georges Barré, *Tunisie, 1942–1943* (Paris, 1950), pp. 134–43. (3) *Marinekdo. Italien, KTB, 1.–15.XI.42,* 9, 11, 13, and 15 Nov 42.

[16] (1) *Les Cahiers Français Information,* No. 48 (September, 1943), p. 23. (2) CSTT Jnl, 8–14 Nov 42.

French forces from all Axis troops were in turn modified by those from General Juin in Algiers to occupy defensive positions west of Bizerte and Tunis at specific places in the Tunisian hills and the Medjerda river valley. In defiance of Juin's orders, Admiral Derrien retained at Bizerte one section of the Tunis Division (3,012 men) as well as the naval troops under his command to defend the coast and operate the coastal batteries. In the presence of this force, Col. Hans Lederer, appointed on 11 November as the German Army's commander of the Tunisian bridgehead, decided that the small force at his command in Bizerte did not justify his following the example of Colonel Harlinghausen, who seized the key positions in Tunis with his troops after the bulk of the French forces had withdrawn from the city on the night of 13–14 November. Lederer's decision was confirmed by Kesselring, who reserved for himself the right to order any action against the French in Bizerte.

Lederer had removed his headquarters from Tunis to Bizerte on 13 November, after consultations with Harlinghausen and the local German naval commander, Captain Loycke. The terrain near Bizerte was more favorable than that near Tunis for building up an initial bridgehead, and Bizerte was, moreover, to be the main supply port for overseas shipments arriving in Tunisia from Italy.[17] But the withdrawal toward Bédja by General Barré's headquarters and over 9,000 of his combat elements was watched by the Germans and Italians with concern. Air reconnaissance eventually confirmed what had been suspected, that the Tunis Division was facing east as if expecting a clash with the Axis troops, and retiring westward toward a junction with Allied columns approaching from Algeria.[18]

During the second week of the race for Tunisia, the pressure on General Barré to oppose the Allies became even more insistent. Orders from Vichy to assist the Axis powers were not only renewed, but Vice Adm. René Platon, Secretary of State to the Chief of Government (Pierre Laval), himself came to Tunisia to see that they were received and understood.[19]

While Admiral Estéva remained compliant and Admiral Derrien promised to continue to resist the Allies, emissaries trying to persuade General Barré found him

[17] (1) *Division v. Broich, Kriegstagebuch* (hereafter cited as *Div. Broich, KTB*), *Nr. 1, 11.XI.–31.XII.42,* 11–14 Nov 42, and *Anlagenheft I, Anlage 4, Anlagenheft II, Anlage 8.* The Axis ground forces in Tunisia on 13 November were divided as follows: Tunis (Colonel Harlinghausen), three companies of *1st Tunis Field Battalion,* one company of paratroopers, one antiaircraft artillery company, *14th Company, 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment,* advance detachment of the *5th Parachute Regiment* of the *Hermann Goering Division* (3 officers and 150 enlisted men); Bizerte (Colonel Lederer), the *5th Battery, 190th Artillery Regiment,* one company of *1st Tunis Field Battalion,* and personnel of the *4th Company, 190th Battalion,* and personnel of the *4th Company, 190th Panzer Battalion,* the *4th Battery, 2d Artillery Regiment,* the *557th Italian Assault Gun Battalion,* and the *136th Italian Tank Destroyer Battalion.* (2) *Marinekdo. Italien, KTB,* 14, 15 Nov 42. (3) Rpt by Col Mendel of CSTT, 0510, 14 Nov 42, in Journal de Marche de la Division de marche de Constantine (journal hereafter cited as DMC Jnl). (4) CSTT Jnl, 11 Nov 42 (Note furnished to Service Historique by General Barré at a later date).

[18] (1) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42,* 16 Nov 42. (2) Giraud Hq, Rapport des opérations en Tunisie, pp. 2–5.

[19] (1) Platon arrived at Tunis airdrome at 0900, 15 November. Rpt, *V.O. Tunis* (Liaison Officer, Tunis), *Lage Nord-Afrika (A, Ausl/Abw, B. Nr. 47351/42 g. IM WEST S)* to *Chef I fuer Chef Amt Aus/Abw, 16.XI.1942,* in *OKW/Ag Ausland IIA5, Alliierte Landung im Franzoesisch-Nordafrika am 8. November 1942, Band I.* He went to Bizerte that evening and remained two days. (2) *Les Cahiers Français Information,* No. 48 (September, 1943), pp. 23 ff.

elusive.[20] When the Germans complained that roadblocks erected by his troops were barring the armed reconnaissance parties, Barré replied: "I protest energetically against the incursion of a German scout car followed by a truck carrying about 20 men, coming from Mateur in the direction of Beja [Bédja]. They broke through several roadblocks; it is reported that shots were exchanged on that account." [21] His troops were apparently instructed to fire on Axis units which attempted to pass through his lines. Such incidents confirmed the belief that Barré was in communication with the Allies and was waiting until he could operate with them against Axis troops.[22]

Axis Military Planning

The Axis high command meanwhile continued to formulate strategy. German military intelligence calculated that the Allies had in Algeria three or four divisions and between fifteen and twenty thousand corps and army troops, and that the defection of the French forces in Morocco and Algiers had relieved the Allies of the necessity of defending their bridgeheads there. The Germans expected an early Allied advance on Tunisia, and they feared a thrust to the Sousse, Sfax, or Gabès areas which might sever Axis overland ties with the *German-Italian Panzer Army* and enclose the Tunisian bridgehead. Kesselring therefore proposed to build up a new front in Tunisia immediately, in line with policy previously decided upon. For this he estimated he would need three things: a new army approximately as strong as the *German-Italian Panzer Army,* although of a somewhat different composition; as long a period as possible in which the British Eighth Army would be engaged by Rommel at a substantial distance from Tunisia; and a secure line of transport from Italy.

To meet Kesselring's requests, the OKW sent over a new German ground commander, and ordered to Tunisia three divisions, the *10th Panzer* and the *Hermann Goering Division* from France and the new *334th Infantry Division,* then being organized in Germany. To these were added an Italian corps headquarters and two Italian divisions, which Mussolini had already begun to transport to Tunisia. Rommel was again exhorted to withdraw as slowly as possible; Mussolini asserted that the fate of the Axis forces in Africa depended upon Rommel's ability to delay the British as long as possible. A shuffle in command responsibilities was ordered to improve the shipping situation. None of these measures could be completely executed because of conflicting demands made by the rapidly worsening situation on the Eastern Front.[23]

[20] Estéva told the U.S. consul on 8 November 1942, upon receiving a letter from President Roosevelt as the landings began, that he would follow Pétain's orders. Telg, Doolittle to State Dept, CM-IN 3690.

[21] (1) *Div. Broich, KTB I, 11.XI.–31.XII.42,* 15 Nov 42. (2) Msg, IV Region Maritime Marine en Tunisie to Colonel Lederer, No. 621 EM/SECA, 15 Nov 42, in *Div. Broich, KTB I, 11.XI–31.XII.42, Anlagenheft II, Anlage 7.* (3) Msg, Lederer to *OB SUED, Ia Nr. 6/42,* 15 Nov 42, in *ibid., Anlage 8.*

[22] (1) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.X.42.* (2) The 1st Parachute Battalion (Br.) was at Bédja, 16–17 November, after an airdrop at Souk el Arba during the previous afternoon, and Blade Force was coming eastward.

[23] (1) Rpt, *GenStdH/Abt Fremde Heere West, Nr. 918/42,* 17 Nov 42, in *OKH/Op Abt, S IV–Chefsachen, Teil II.* (2) *SKL/1.Abt, KTB, Teil A, 1.–30.XI.42,* 14–17 Nov 42. (3) MS # T–3–PII (Kesselring), Pt. 2. (4) MS # C–065a (Greiner), 14–17 Nov 42. (5) *Panzer Armee Afrika, Schlachtbericht 23.X.42–15.I.43, Band 1* (hereafter cited as *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Band 1*), 14 Nov 42.

Even before the Allied landings, Kesselring and the OKW had been planning to clarify and simplify the complicated German chain of command in the Mediterranean. A beginning was made in October 1942, when Kesselring as Commander in Chief, South, became responsible for organizing the defense of all German-occupied coastal areas in the Mediterranean. This mission applied to the Balkans and Crete but not to the African areas controlled by Rommel's forces. After the invasion, when he was saddled with the additional responsibility for the conduct of ground operations in Tunisia, Kesselring reorganized his headquarters. He created separate staffs for *OB SUED* and *Luftflotte 2* and further, within *OB SUED,* directed that Col. Siegfried Westphal, the deputy chief of staff for operations, hold specific responsibility for the African theater, while General der Flieger Paul Deichmann, the chief of staff, remained responsible for overall theater matters.[24]

All the men and matériel which could be spared for the Mediterranean from other fronts were needed by both Field Marshal Rommel's *German-Italian Panzer Army* and the new command in Tunisia. Each faced the prospect of conducting a defensive campaign against an aggressive foe while hampered by shortages of all kinds. Rommel sought to protect the interests of his command by installing Generalmajor Alfred Gause in Rome as his deputy. To guarantee a unified German policy toward the Italian High Command, Hitler on 16 November ordered the subordination of General Gause and General von Rintelen, the German General at *Comando Supremo,* to Field Marshal Kesselring as Commander in Chief, South. Gause, under Kesselring's control, was to prepare in southern Italy the army units intended for the Tunisian and Tripolitanian theaters and see to their timely arrival at ports of embarkation. No change was intended in the subordination of Rommel's army to the Duce through *Comando Supremo* nor in the direct control over General von Rintelen by the Armed Forces High Command in "all matters outside the province of the Commander in Chief, South." [25]

When the Allied operations in Northwest Africa began, General der Panzertruppen Walther Nehring, the commander of the *German Africa Corps (DAK),* convalescing near Berlin from wounds he had received in Egypt on 31 August 1942, was ordered back to Rommel's *German-Italian Panzer Army,* to prepare the proposed Marsa el Brega position. En route to his post, he reached Rome on 12 November, but there he was stopped. His orders had been canceled; he was sent instead to Tunisia to command a new corps to be formed there. At Kesselring's headquarters the field marshal told him exactly what was expected: the establishment of a bridgehead extending to the west at least as far as necessary for freedom of maneuver, and if possible as far as the Tunisian-Algerian border. Kesselring and the OKW considered the present commander inadequate and hoped that Nehring would be able to master the situation. Only a very few German troops were on the ground. A new headquarters was being organized. The mission would require resourceful improvisation by all manner of ex-

[24] (1) MS # C–065a (Greiner), 14 Nov 42. (2) Hitler's Dir, 13 Oct 42 (*OKW/WFSt/Op Nr. 551743/42*), ONI, *Fuehrer Directives, 1942–1945.* (3) MS # T–3–PII (Kesselring). (4) MS # D–067 (Deichmann).

[25] (1) MS # C–065a (Greiner), 14–17 Nov 42. (2) Hitler's Order, 16 Nov 42, in *OKH/Op Abt, S IV, Chefsachen, Teil II.*

pedients for some weeks to come. Nehring after this briefing flew to Tunisia on 14 November, where he made a personal survey of the situation. He returned to Rome in the evening to receive his final instructions at *OB SUED* on the next day.[26]

The initial Axis reaction to the Allied landings was a swift determination to challenge the Allies in Tunisia and a rapid improvisation of the means.[27] Like the Allies, Germany and especially Italy were mindful of the campaign in Libya, but Hitler encouraged Mussolini to look also to the west. Operations in Tunisia would be supported, he wrote, by some of the best German divisions and some of the heaviest and most effective tanks in existence, for the objective of the operations in Tunisia must be an advance to the west which would destroy the Allied-French North African positions in the Mediterranean.[28]

Clark-Darlan Negotiations

What the Germans would do had not become wholly apparent to the French either in Vichy or Algiers as Darlan's negotiations with the Allied deputy commander in chief began. When General Clark, accompanied by Robert Murphy and Capt. Royer M. Dick (RN), met Admiral Darlan and his associates on Tuesday morning, 10 November, at the Hotel St. Georges to discuss the future relations between the Allies and the French in Northwest Africa, each negotiator was under great pressure. General Clark was in desperate need of putting an early stop to the hostilities between the French and the Allies, and of bringing about French armed resistance to the Axis forces entering Tunisia. He hoped to enlist the French fleet on the Allied side. Fighting in Algiers had been suspended for more than a day, but at 0855, as the conference opened, the final Allied attack was about to penetrate Oran, while on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, the three sub-task forces of General Patton's command were at the climax of their interrelated operations, and Admiral Hewitt's naval force, having destroyed many fine French warships, was a magnet for approaching enemy submarines. The commandant of the airdrome at Tunis had fled westward bringing word of the unresisted arrival there on 9 November of a considerable number of Axis aircraft.[29] Were Axis forces to gain an easy foothold in Tunisia? To prevent it would require prompt and decisive countermeasures by the French armed forces. Admiral Darlan, on the other hand, had made known to the Allies that he would negotiate for all French North Africa if he could do so without associating with dissident French leaders, such as Generals Giraud and Mast,[30] but when

[26] MS # D–086 (Nehring). Nehring, then a colonel, had served at the opening of World War II as chief of staff of the *XIX Army Corps*. In 1940 he commanded the *18th Panzer Division* as a brigadier general. He was promoted to major general and became acting commander of the *German Africa Corps* in February 1942. In July 1942 he was confirmed as commanding general of the *Africa Corps* and at the same time promoted to lieutenant general.

[27] (1) MS # C–065a (Greiner), 14 Nov 42. (2) Compilation, *Truppen fuer Tunis,* 13 Nov 42, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt,* File *Tunis, 10.XI.42–2.V.43.*

[28] Ltr, Hitler to Mussolini, 20 Nov 42, in von Rohden Collection, # 4376–33.

[29] (1) Rad 1938, EQM TF to AFCP, 9 Nov 42. AFHQ G–3 Ops 22/5, Micro Job 10A, Reel 5C. (2) Telgs, 9 Nov 42, Nos. 863/Cab and 864/Cab, in CSTT Jnl Annex.

[30] The original message, sent via Royal Navy radio, partially garbled, was passed on to General Eisenhower by Admiral Cunningham late on 8 November. It was sent at 1658 and received at 1726. CinC AF Diary, 9 Nov 42.

he proposed to Vichy the mild terms of an armistice which he believed would be acceptable to the Allies, he was instructed to refrain from negotiations without an express authorization.[31] Further resistance to the Allies was obviously useless. But the choice between passive neutrality and active assistance to the Allies, including defense of Tunisian ports and airfields against the Germans, involved a political rather than a military decision. It should be determined by governmental authorities and be transmitted in the form of orders to the armed services. Co-operation with the Allies, if that should be the decision, would then become compatible with the oaths of loyalty and the professional obligations of the French forces.

General Clark's approach to the issues was forthright and compelling: delay until the Vichy government came to a decision in a cabinet meeting that afternoon was completely inadmissible; Admiral Darlan must act at once, issuing a cease-fire order for all French North Africa, or be taken into custody and held incommunicado; the Americans would then arrange matters with other French leaders. Shortly before noon, Darlan drafted and signed in the Marshal's name directives to the chiefs of armed forces requiring them to break off all hostilities and to observe complete neutrality. The orders were reported by radio and also transmitted by courier planes.[32] As previously narrated, Oran had already yielded, and Darlan's orders were accepted in Morocco by General Noguès and Admiral Michelier and put into effect barely in time to save Casablanca from a destructive attack.

A French decision to join the Allies in active resistance to the Germans and Italians remained in suspense, while even Darlan's cease-fire order was jeopardized by events later on 10 November. Pétain approved it but when Pierre Laval, en route to Munich to face Hitler and Count Ciano and their military entourage, learned of Darlan's action, he persuaded Pétain by telephone to withdraw his initial approbation and to disavow Darlan's action. Darlan then replied to the Marshal, "I annul my order and constitute myself a prisoner." But at Darlan's own suggestion, the Allies put him under arrest before the orders of annulment could be issued. His powers were next transferred by Pétain's decree to General Noguès, and he declared himself unable to treat further with General Clark. It was left to those who had received his earlier order to reconcile the conflicting instructions with their sense of what they were bound in honor to do. Night fell on 10 November with the Eastern Task Force preparing to steam along the coast east of Algiers, where French port commanders had instructions from Admiral Moreau in Algiers which conflicted sharply with those derived from General Juin. The former prescribed resistance to the Allies; the latter, friendly conduct toward the Allies and resistance to Axis forces if they attacked.[33]

If 10 November brought a seesaw in the general situation in Algiers, the next day produced another. Clark sought to get from

[31] Record of Events and Documents From the Date That Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark Entered Negotiations With Admiral Jean François Darlan Until Darlan Was Assassinated on Christmas Eve, 1942 (hereafter cited as Record of Clark-Darlan Negotiations), p. 4. DRB AGO. This record is based on the verbatim notes kept by one of General Clark's staff.

[32] (1) Record of Clark-Darlan Negotiations, pp. 9–11. (2) Rad 12572, Clark via NC ETF to NCXF for Eisenhower 10 Nov 42, CinC AF Diary, 10 Nov 42.

[33] (1) CSTT Jnl, p. 11, contains a copy of Darlan's order. (2) DMC Jnl, entries at 1755, 1820, 1900 and 2050, 10 Nov 42.

the French at least as much resistance to Axis occupation of Tunisian ports and airdromes as they had offered to the Allies before Darlan's cease-fire order of the preceding day. He sought in addition full participation by the French in the anti-Axis effort, including the issuance of orders by Admiral Darlan to Admiral de Laborde at Toulon to bring the French fleet over to the Allied side. At first Admiral Darlan professed to be completely powerless as a result of Marshal Pétain's disavowal of his cease-fire order of the previous day. Then he received by a secret and personal channel of communication with Vichy a message that the disavowal had been made under constraint and was contrary to the Marshal's actual wishes.[34] The Germans and Italians, as already noted, entered unoccupied France that night over the Marshal's protests and in execution of plans long ready for such a situation.[35] Darlan thereupon directed General Juin to order the commanders in chief of ground and air forces, to resist the Axis in Tunisia. In the welter of radio broadcasts that day, Marshal Pétain responded to German pressure exerted through Pierre Laval by publishing his disavowal of Admiral Darlan's armistice and announcing his transfer of all authority in North Africa from Darlan to General Noguès. General Noguès in Morocco none the less accepted instructions from Darlan to report to Algiers on 12 November to confer with the French leaders.

In view of the Vichy broadcasts, some of General Juin's subordinates questioned the authenticity of his pro-Allied orders and forced their suspension.[36] General Clark stormed in protest to Admiral Darlan and General Juin against what looked like surreptitious cancellation of orders to the Tunisian French forces to resist the Germans. His demands led General Juin to procure continuation of resistance in Tunisia wherever practicable without waiting for General Noguès' orders.[37] But the situation on 12 November depended on Admiral Darlan's ability to persuade others to co-operate with General Giraud, with whom he was prepared to associate himself, and to convince General Noguès that he should join the combination in a secondary role.[38]

General Giraud, after coming to a satisfactory understanding with General Eisenhower and Admiral Cunningham at Gibraltar, had arrived in Algiers before General Clark. It was agreed that Giraud was to be recognized as Commander in Chief of French forces and as Governor of French North Africa. He undertook to cooperate steadily with the Allied commander in chief. He expected, in case of a prolonged battle in Tunisia, that a small interallied staff would prepare plans for joint consideration and that, on a broad front requiring subordinate military zones, command in each zone would be exercised by an officer from the national force providing the largest number of troops there. Moreover, all orders to French forces would be issued

[34] (1) Kammerer, *Du débarquement Africain au meurtre de Darlan*, pp. 408–11. (2) Haute Cour de Justice, *Procès du Maréchal Pétain* (Paris, 1945), pp. 279–82 (Testimony of Capt Edouard Archambaud), 300 (Letter of Juin). (3) Leahy, *I Was There*, p. 339.

[35] Msg, *OKW/WFSt (Nr.551929/42)* to *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt*, 10 Nov 42, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt*, File *Tunis, 10.XI.42–2.V.43.*

[36] In Tunisia, Admiral Darlan and General Juin were believed to be prisoners of the Americans. Interv, Marcel Vigneras with Gen Juin, Rabat, 5 Dec 48. OCMH.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] (1) Record of Clark-Darlan Negotiations, pp. 26–35. (2) Interv, Vigneras with Juin, 5 Dec 48. OCMH.

by General Giraud.[39] This relationship was a substantial recession from his demand to be accepted as Interallied Commander in Chief, and to be given active command after the landings had been in progress for about forty-eight hours. The delay in arriving at this undertaking was prejudicial to his success, although hardly responsible for his failure. For he did fail.

Darlan's willingness to negotiate with the Allies for the suspension of hostilities was made known to General Eisenhower while Giraud was en route to Algiers from Gibraltar.[40] The Allies were faced with the prospect of two rival French leaders and were discovering that the bulk of the French armed forces were determined to follow orders in a legitimate chain of command. Whoever gained their support must speak with the authority of Marshal Pétain. Giraud appeared as a revolutionist, a dissident, however popular his cause, however patriotic his motives. Darlan wore the mantle of the Marshal. He made it fit him, even after public disavowal and condemnation by the Marshal, by recourse to the Marshal's "secret thought." He was following the instructions which Pétain was supposed to have given him in 1940 in anticipation of a situation requiring such a double game against the Nazis, and, in so doing, he satisfied the requirements of many men in French North Africa who wished to fight for France without violating the obligations of honor.[41]

Giraud passed the night of 9–10 November with friends near Algiers and conferred with adherents who revealed how completely they had miscalculated the actual conduct of the French armed forces when faced with the test. The appeal in Giraud's name over the radio early on 8 November had proved to be unavailing. General Mast and his associates were in seclusion. General Béthouart and others were under arrest. Giraud had lost the initiative. He was wholly unable to effect an extension of the truce from Algiers to the rest of French North Africa, let alone call for a return to active hostilities against the Axis, beginning in Tunisia, with any expectation of success. As a political leader he would depend upon Allied military support rather than on French approbation. He would be more a Maximilian than a Juarez.[42]

After almost four days of deliberation, General Clark, with Robert Murphy's assistance, brought about on 13 November a workable pattern of French organization for immediate collaboration with the Allies. Responsibilities were assigned as follows: Darlan, High Commissioner and Commander in Chief of Naval Forces; Giraud, Commander in Chief of Ground and Air Forces; Juin, Commander of the Eastern Sector; Noguès, Commander of the Western Sector and Resident General of French Morocco; Châtel, Governor General of Algeria. Active participation by the French in liberating Tunisia and then metropolitan France was to begin immediately, while detailed terms governing relations with the Allied Force were to be formulated by subsequent negotiation. General Eisenhower, during a quick visit with Admiral Cunningham from Gibraltar, expressed his

[39] Gen Mason MacFarlane Notes, 8 Nov 42. Copy in CinC AF Diary, Bk. V, pp. A–147–52.

[40] CinC AF Diary, 9 Nov 42.

[41] [Maxime] Weygand, *Mémoirs: Rappelé au service* (Paris, 1950), p. 545, sets the date for these instructions, of which he then knew nothing, as about August 1940.

[42] (1) Giraud, *Un seul but: la victoire*, pp. 38–40. (2) Barjot, *Le débarquement du 8 novembre 1942 en Afrique du Nord*, pp. 179–87.



GENERAL EISENHOWER WITH ADM. JEAN FRANÇOIS DARLAN, *General Clark, and Mr. Robert Murphy after a meeting in Algiers, 13 November 1943.*

satisfaction.[43] Such an understanding as this reflected two major factors: first, General Noguès had renounced Pétain's assignment to him of supreme authority in French North Africa and had advised the Marshal that it should remain with Darlan; second, General Giraud was accepted by the others despite his standing as a dissident officer. The agreement was put into force with enthusiasm and with much greater peace of mind as a consequence of a message by secret channel from the Marshal that Darlan's leadership had his approval.[44]

Among the Allied leaders in London, the atmosphere on 12 November was most hopeful, with talk by the Prime Minister of General Eisenhower's returning from Gibraltar soon for a conference on general strategy. The Northern Task Force, which had been designated for a counterattack in Spanish territory, could be employed elsewhere; arrangements for accumulating

[43] (1) Record of Clark-Darlan Negotiations, pp. 42–44. (2) CinC AF Diary, 13–15 Nov 42. (3) Butcher, *My Three Years With Eisenhower*, pp. 190–92.

[44] Msg, Pétain to Noguès, 1400, 13 Nov 42. Copies printed in slightly different forms in Kammerer, *Du débarquement Africain au meurtre de Darlan*, pp. 484–86, and in Haute Cour de Justice, *Procès du Maréchal Pétain*, p. 300.



ALLIED LEADERS IN ALGIERS. *From left, front row: Admiral Darlan, Adm. Sir Andrew Browne Cunningham, General Eisenhower, and Henri Giraud with back turned.*

troops in French North Africa might even be curtailed in order to attack new objectives.[45] First reports of the Allied occupation impressed the Fighting French most favorably. General de Gaulle appeared to welcome the appearance of General Giraud among the overt opponents of the government at Vichy. His broadcast on the evening of 8 November called on all French patriots to support the Allied operations to the full. On 10 November he proposed to send to North Africa a mission which might facilitate the creation of unity between General Giraud's group there and his own. The proposal received the Prime Minister's endorsement and the President's qualified approval.[46]

Receipt in London of news that the Allies had accepted association with Admiral Darlan produced an abrupt change in the prevailing optimism. A new face on the whole North African project emerged from the mists of censorship. Unity among the anti-Axis French was obviously impossible if Darlan were leading those in North Africa. The Free French feared that the Allies

[45] Msg G–253, Smith to Eisenhower, 12 Nov 42. Smith Papers. (See Note on Sources.)

[46] (1) Msg G–234, CofS AF to CinC AF, 11 Nov 42; Msg G–286, Prime Minister to CinC AF, 13 Nov 42. Smith Papers. (2) Record of Admiral Stark's Conversation With General de Gaulle, 12 Nov 42, in COMNAVEU, U. S.-French Relations, 1942–1944, App. B, Pt. II, pp. 12, 57ff. OCMH.

would perpetuate in French North Africa and metropolitan France the very elements which had condemned General de Gaulle as a traitor. De Gaulle and his following could never bring themselves into association with such men. The General worked himself up to the point of sending an insulting communication which Admiral Stark refused to accept, and to the verge of a bitter public announcement from which he was restrained only by Mr. Churchill's attentive persuasion and by the President's declaration that the Allied arrangement with Darlan was merely a "temporary expedient."

After the understanding of 13 November in Algiers between the Allied and French military leaders had received the approval of the President, Prime Minister, and Combined Chiefs of Staff, and had been revealed to the public, the immediate response in the United States as well as the United Kingdom was a swiftly rising tempest of protest.[47] Learning of this reaction, General Eisenhower sent an eloquent message to General Marshall, the crux of which was its opening assertion that "existing French sentiment in North Africa does not even remotely resemble prior calculations, and it is of utmost importance that no precipitate action be taken which will upset such equilibrium as we have been able to establish." [48] General Marshall employed this description in outlining the situation to a hurriedly summoned conference of press and radio commentators on the morning of 15 November. It assisted Secretary Stimson in pacifying some associates in the government next day, as well as helping dissuade Mr. Wendell Willkie from attacking the action in a public broadcast.[49] Besides the many "star-gazing idealists" in the United States who resented the acceptance of Darlan, bitter critics in the United Kingdom also required political sedatives.[50] On 17 November Mr. Churchill took cognizance of the fact that very deep currents of feeling had been stirred. He concluded that the arrangements with Darlan must not lead people to think that the Allies were ready to make terms with local quislings, especially as he believed that the understanding with Darlan could "only be a temporary expedient, justifiable solely by the stress of battle." [51] The President issued a public statement of American policy. He declared flatly that "in view of the history of the past two years no permanent arrangement should be made with Admiral Darlan." The President also pointed out that "no one in our Army has any authority to discuss the future Government of France and the French Empire," and that "temporary arrangements made with Admiral Darlan apply, without exception, to the current local situation only." He concluded, "Reports indicate that the French of North Africa are subordinating all political questions to the formation of a common front against the common enemy." [52]

Darlan complained to General Eisenhower that the Allies evidently intended to use and then discard him, and that they were decreasing his usefulness by thus weakening his influence in French Africa. Yet he con-

[47] Msgs, AGWAR to USFOR, 15 Nov 42, CM-OUT 4943, and 16 Nov 42, CM-OUT 5052.

[48] Quoted from paraphrase first published in full in Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble,* pp. 357–60, and later in large part in Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, p. 652.

[49] Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, pp. 543–44.

[50] The quoted phrase is from Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox. Ltr, Knox to Stark, 18 Nov 42, copy in COMNAVEU, U.S.-French Relations, 1942–1944, App. B, Pt. II, p. 33. OCMH.

[51] Msg, Prime Minister to President, 17 Nov 42, printed in Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate*, pp. 632–33.

[52] Quoted from Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins,* pp. 653–54.

tinued to negotiate detailed agreements governing future relations between the French colonies and the armed forces of the Allies, arrangements pertaining to civil administration, French shipping, and economic activity, and to enlist the support of French West Africa for his program of active warfare against the Axis powers.[53] Aware of these facts Eisenhower in his messages reflected indignation at being drawn into a political morass at a time when the imminent battles in Tunisia were claiming close attention.[54] The War Department stood firmly behind him, refusing to concur in the Department of State's proposal that remedial measures in the French civil administration should be guided by principles which would terminate Allied acceptance of Admiral Darlan.[55]

The North African Agreement

The first of the detailed arrangements between the Allies and the French was that embodied after somewhat protracted negotiations in the North African Agreement of 22 November, known from its signatories as the "Clark-Darlan Agreement." Its preamble and twenty-one articles set forth the bases for co-operative action in the months to follow. Most of the statement of purposes was phrased in language taken from letters written, before the landings, by Mr. Robert Murphy as the President's personal representative in French North Africa to Giraud and other friendly French officers. The terms of many articles were from the draft armistice terms approved in advance of the operation by the Combined Chiefs of Staff.[56] To avoid the appearance of diplomatic recognition of Darlan's political status, the word "protocol" was dropped from the title, and General Eisenhower was urged to announce it unilaterally as an acceptable understanding with Darlan. The general plan provided for the closest possible co-operation in the effort to expel the Axis forces from North Africa, liberate metropolitan France, and "restore integrally the French Empire." The French were to control their own forces and resources within the framework of general policies satisfactory to the Allied commander in chief. They granted tax immunity and legal extraterritoriality to Allied personnel. The commanding general was authorized to designate as military areas the places he deemed to be "of importance or useful to the purposes set forth in the preamble." Administration, public services, and public order in these areas would then come under his direct control. Allied military forces were to have unrestricted use of all telecommunication services, which were to be operated and maintained by the French. The fiction of a paramount American position in the campaign led to frequent reference to the Allied commander in chief as the Commanding General, U.S. Army, "with supporting forces." [57]

[53] (1) COMNAVEU, U.S.-French Relations, 1942–1944, App. B, Pt. II, p. 57ff. OCMH. This contains copies of letters and memoranda. (2) Msg, Eisenhower to Marshall, 29 Nov 42, CM-IN 13024.

[54] (1) Msg, AFCP Gibraltar (Commandeth) to AGWAR, 18 Nov 42 CM-IN 7911. (2) Msg, Eisenhower to Smith, 18 Nov 42. Smith Papers.

[55] Msg, AGWAR to USFOR, 17 Nov 42, CM-OUT 5428.

[56] (1) Text is CCS 103/18, 30 Jan 43. (2) Also on AFHQ Micro Job 24, Reel 136D. (3) The armistice terms are CCS 103/9, 16 Oct 42, reproducing Memo, G–3 AFHQ for CofS, 3 Oct 42.

[57] (1) General Eisenhower saw less significance in the exact phraseology than in the general lines of the understanding which must succeed in galvanizing the French civilians and armed forces into action. (2) CCS 103/17, North African Protocol 1, 20 Nov 42. (3) CCS 49th Mtg, 20 Nov 42, Item 8.

The North African Agreement was negotiated by Allied military leaders and approved by the President and the Combined Chiefs of Staff as a military measure. But from the outset, the nature of the Allied relationship to the Darlan administration was viewed in different lights by the Allied commander in chief, who was well aware of his dependence upon voluntary French aid, and by the President, who was inclined to think of French North Africa as conquered and occupied.[58]

The public unrest over the Allied affiliation with Darlan in North Africa had somewhat abated by 22 November, when the actual detailed agreement with him was signed in Algiers. Brig. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, chief of staff of AFHQ, reported from London on 24 November that the Prime Minister and Cabinet were giving the arrangement firm support. He then flew to the United States partly to help eliminate the resentment still prevailing there. Admiral Stark also wrote to Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox a stalwart defense of the arrangement with Darlan. "I told DeGaulle," he said, "that had I been in Eisenhower's shoes I would have done exactly as Eisenhower has, and that I believe he [de Gaulle], as a soldier, would have done the same thing." [59]

Rearmament of French troops with modern arms had been promised successively to Mast at Cherchel, Giraud at Gibraltar, and Darlan's group at Algiers. The Combined Chiefs of Staff were now ready to make a small token shipment as soon as it could be conveyed.[60] The extent and timing of additional transfers of arms would be dependent upon events and conditions. By 16 December, AFHQ created a Joint Rearmament Committee,[61] which continued in service through the next two years, but during the next few months actual delivery of arms to the French was cut down by shortages in armament and shipping and by the preferential claims of the expanding American Army.

Following the agreement of 22 November, further negotiations led to accord on economic matters and to adherence by French West Africa to Darlan's arrangement with the Allied commander in chief. On 3 December a "Provisional Arrangement" for the employment of French shipping was signed in Algiers. It confirmed the right of the Allies to convert the harbors of Oran and Algiers more fully to their own military uses, and it enlarged the global pool of shipping in the service of Allied operations.[62] The title "Provisional Arrangement," was another concession to the President's view that General Eisenhower's authority was that of plenary military command over the whole area and that he should enter into no formal agreement or contract, but the General felt compelled to report that "it is impossible to exaggerate the degree to which, in carrying on the fight

[58] General Eisenhower, on the advice of Admiral Cunningham and others at Gibraltar, submitted the agreement to the Combined Chiefs of Staff rather than act on his own responsibility. The President's view appeared in a conference with the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 7 January 1943. Min in OPD Exec 10, Item 45.

[59] (1) Msg, Smith to Marshall, 24 Nov 42, CM-IN 10359. (2) Msgs, Stark to Knox, 24 Nov 42, and Smith to Eisenhower, 25 Nov 42. Copies in Smith Papers.

[60] (1) Msgs: AGWAR to USFOR, 11 Nov 42, CM-OUT 3689; Commandeth to AGWAR, 19 Nov 42, CM-IN 8049 and CM-IN 8050; AGWAR to USFOR, 21 Nov 42, CM-OUT 6859. (2) CCS 48th and 49th Mtgs, 13 and 20 Nov 42.

[61] AFHQ Staff Memo 52.

[62] Msg, FREEDOM to AGWAR 3 Dec 42, CM-IN 1943.

in Tunisia, we are dependent upon the good will and cooperation of the French." [63]

French West Africa Co-operates

Governor General Pierre Boisson of French West Africa and Togoland came to Algiers directly after the North African Agreement was completed and joined with Darlan and General Eisenhower in arriving at terms of collaboration by his colony with the Allies. French West Africa and Togoland were strategically located on the western bulge of Africa in a position important for transatlantic and north-south travel both by air and by sea. The port of Dakar had caused great concern to the Allies, for French warships, including the battleship *Richelieu,* harbored there, and airfields and coastal air bases in that area could be of great value. Boisson had denied use of the territory to Fighting French, British, and Axis nationals alike. On 8 November, Marshal Pétain recognized this loyalty in declaring: "The attack on North Africa has taken place. Be ready for all emergencies. The Marshal and his government count on you." [64] On 22 November, Boisson and the military commander, General Jean Barrau, broadcast French West Africa's adherence to Darlan, professing complete confidence that the step was in conformity with Marshal Pétain's actual desires.[65]

Because earlier events in the war had created strong anti-British feeling in French West Africa, Boisson insisted upon negotiating only with Americans.[66] It was therefore deemed impolitic to insist that Admiral Cunningham participate with Eisenhower, Boisson, and Darlan in arriving at an understanding. Instead, and with no concealment of the fact that British wishes in this matter were indistinguishable from those of the American government, General Eisenhower concluded an understanding which was transmitted in draft on 4 December for approval by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. With modification to meet the requirements of the British and the views of the President, it was announced unilaterally by General Eisenhower on 7 December.[67] It was parallel in form and content with the North African Agreement of 22 November, but it had the further explicit provision (2c) that no measures would be taken by American, British, or Allied authorities which would result in any French troops combating other French troops. The understanding announced on 7 December was concluded with the expectation that, after Boisson returned to Dakar, he would receive a mission directly from the United States, headed by Rear Adm. William A. Glassford, Jr. (U.S.), to arrange for the Allied use of air, seaplane, and naval bases there.

The Glassford Mission was well received in Dakar. It arranged an understanding in conformity with its directive from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and with due regard to the needs of the British services.[68] Existing mili-

[63] *Ibid.*

[64] Copy of transl in Msg, Tuck to Secy of State, 8 Nov 42. WDCSA 381 TORCH Sec. 2.

[65] Texts of their remarks were transmitted in Msg, US Consul Dakar (Fayette J. Flexer) to State Dept, 26 Nov 42. Copy of transl in WDCSA 384 Africa.

[66] Churchill, *Their Finest Hour,* pp. 236, 488–93.

[67] Copy in an appendix to CCS 129, Instructions to the "Glassford Mision" to Dakar. The Allies would not countenance a proposal to call the Darlan-Boisson group the 'French Imperial Federation."

[68] The instructions from the Joint Chiefs were embodied in CCS 129. The communications between Boisson and the commission are in CCS 129/3, 8 Jan 43.

tary facilities became available to the Allies. They could thus exercise undivided control of sea communications from the United Kingdom to the Cape of Good Hope. Such substantial benefits to the Allied war effort remained subject to one nagging difficulty, that of inducing the Fighting French in Equatorial Africa to cease treating Boisson's colonies as essentially hostile.[69]

French Organization for Military Co-operation

Long before the last stage of negotiations to establish the terms of co-operation in northwest Africa, the French had organized and begun to furnish active military assistance against Axis forces in Tunisia. The military chain of command over ground forces under Admiral Darlan's regime placed General Giraud directly under Darlan. Giraud was Commander in Chief of Ground and Air Forces, responsible for their organization, training, and employment. He was expected to co-ordinate the operations of French forces with those of the Anglo-American allies. In combined Army-Navy operations, he was to act through the Commander in Chief of Naval and Naval Air Forces in Africa (Admiral Jacques Moreau). His authority over military activities in French West Africa was to be exercised through the Commander in Chief of Armed Forces in that territory (General Barrau). His authority over French units in North Africa would be exercised through the Commander in Chief of Ground Forces (General Juin).[70]

Giraud looked ahead to creating a detachment of the French Army which would not only participate in driving the Axis from Tunisia but would go on to help liberate the French empire. In the meantime, he ordered full mobilization in French North Africa and French West Africa and set about making maximum use of the French units already available. He prescribed as a system of command an arrangement which included the reciprocal subordination of small French or Anglo-American detachments to large units of another nationality in their respective zones of action but which depended primarily on orders emanating from his headquarters through a French chain of command. Co-ordination of French operations with those of the Allied Force would be insured, he declared, by the proximity of French and Anglo-American command groups and collaboration between them in arriving at decisions.[71]

On 15 November, Giraud's first directive to General Juin prescribed a covering role for French troops along a general line from Tabarka on the northern coast to Tébessa, behind which the Allied Force could concentrate for an attack against Bizerte. Juin, giving effect to this directive, divided his forces into a Covering Detachment and an East Saharan Command. In command of the first he put his corps commander, Gen. Louis-Marie Koeltz, with headquarters at Constantine. Over the latter he retained

[69] (1) Msgs: AGWAR to Commandeth, 24 Oct 42, CM-OUT 7682; Commandeth to AGWAR, 24 Nov 42, CM-IN 10301, 25 Nov 42, CM-IN 10902, 29 Nov 42, CM-IN 13024, and 3 Dec 42, CM-IN 699; FREEDOM to AGWAR, 7 Dec 42, CM-IN 3279; AGWAR to FREEDOM, 9 Dec 42, CM-OUT 3117. (2) CCS 51st Mtg, 4 Dec 42. (3) CCS 129. (4) The Prime Minister's approval of all General Eisenhower's political decisions was conveyed on 13 December, after his report in a secret Parliamentary session. Msg 543, USFOR to FREEDOM, 13 Dec 42. ETOUSA Outgoing Cables, Kansas City Rcds Ctr.

[70] Adm of Fleet Darlan, Order 7M, 15 Nov 42.

[71] Hq, CinC (Giraud), No. 18/Cab, 18 November 1942.

General Delay, whose headquarters was at Ouargla, Algeria.[72]

General Koeltz was able to adapt the measures already taken under the standing orders for the defense of French North Africa against attack from the east, to the requirements of his new orders. He designated key points along the forward line for the Covering Detachment: Tabarka, Souk el Arba, Le Kef, Tadjerouine and the nearby Sidi Amor Gap, Djebel Dir (1474) and passes east and south of Tébessa. The major elements under his command were the Tunisian Troops under Gen. Georges Barré on the north and the Constantine Division under Gen. Joseph Edouard Welvert on the southwest. A boundary between their zones of action ran along the road from Souk Ahras to Le Kef. Before long, he expected the Algiers Division (Gen. Agathon Deligne) and the Algerian Light Armored Brigade (Col. J. L. Touzet de Vigier) to come forward and assume sectors along the front.

None of these French units had sufficient modern weapons or equipment, including transport. All were below strength as a result of the conditions imposed by the armistice with the Axis powers. Cadres were ready for eventual expansion and the whole army was in need of modernization with matériel provided by the Allies in fulfillment of promises made to Giraud and his associates during the negotiations before the Allied landings.[73]

As pointed out earlier, Allied and Axis forces had already clashed in Tunisia long before the last stage of the political negotiations. The initial Axis reaction to the Allied landings and the ultimate decision by the French to take an active part in freeing Tunisia were followed by intensive efforts by both sides to gain the upper hand at Tunis and Bizerte before the winter rains began. The narrative now takes up the operations of the Eastern Task Force as it advanced toward Tunis.

[72] (1) Giraud Hq, Rapport des opérations, p. 18, and Annexes 1 and 2. (2) Giraud, *Un seul but: la victoire,* pp. 46–47. (3) CinC of the French Ground Forces of North Africa, Gen Order 4, 15 Nov 42. Copy in CSTT Jnl, p. 28.

[73] See Marcel Vigneras, *Rearming the French,* UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II (Washington, 1957).

PART FOUR

THE END OF OPERATION TORCH

CHAPTER XV

Taking Positions for the Drive on Tunis

The Allied and Axis powers each rushed forces into northern Tunisia at the earliest opportunity, assuming grave risks. The first air and ground units sent by the Germans and Italians landed on Tunisian airfields and entered the port of Bizerte in close proximity to thousands of French troops capable of overwhelming them. Lt. Gen. Kenneth A. N. Anderson's task force left its base at Algiers hundreds of miles behind as its units pressed eastward along the coast and overland through a French and Arabic population that was puzzled, indifferent, or hostile. Operations were carried on while the political situation was being explored and before a friendly arrangement with the French could be assured.

Assuming maximum French co-operation, Allied strategists had made plans to employ parachute troops and Commandos for the successive seizure of the airdromes at Bône, Bizerte, and Tunis on 11, 12, and 13 November. Reserves that had not been committed at Algiers would be sent by sea to the Golfe de Bougie for the seizure on 12 November of the port of Bougie and the neighboring airdrome at Djidjelli, thus obtaining a forward base with fighter protection against the Axis bombers capable of striking from Sicilian airfields.[1] But with French co-operation still uncertain, the Commandos and parachutists could not wisely be sent so far ahead of Allied ground troops. Instead, the British 78th Division, under the command of Maj. Gen. Vyvyan Evelegh, undertook first to occupy Bougie and Djidjelli, and next to rush as many troops as possible overland via Sétif and Constantine to a railhead at Souk Ahras in Tunisia, while a second air and seaborne expedition took Bône.

Advance Into Tunisia

The revised plans went into effect on 9 November.[2] Distances were considerable, about 260 airline miles from Algiers to Bône and 120 miles more to Bizerte or Tunis. The country to be crossed was rugged. The long lines of communications would be vulnerable at many points which would have to be left unprotected at first. Risky and difficult the swift advance might be, but speed was fundamental to achieve the main purpose of the entire TORCH Operation.

The Eastern Task Force held in reserve afloat off Algiers a force to be landed at Bougie as soon as possible after D Day.[3] At 1830, 10 November, a fast convoy left Algiers for the objective, almost 100 miles

[1] (1) Outline Plan Opn TORCH, 8 Oct 42, Annex 4 (ETF Outline Plan), 28 Oct 42, pars. 5, 7. OPD 381 TORCH. (2) First Army Opn Instruc 4, 15 Oct 42, App. B. DRB AGO.

[2] The chief source for the operations of British Army and Royal Air Force units has been information supplied by Cabinet Office and Air Ministry, London.

[3] Operation PERPETUAL. A brief account is given in Br. Battle Sum 38, Operation "Torch," p. 43–44. Copy in OCMH.

away on the western shore of the Golfe de Bougie. From the airfield at Djidjelli protection could be furnished to an advance assault shipping base at Bougie. Four infantry landing ships of the Royal Navy (*Karanja, Marnix, Awatea,* and *Cathay*), carrying the 36th Infantry Brigade Group (Br.), and six escorting warships overtook a slower group of five cargo vessels and ten warships which had started for Bougie at 1600. A covering force to the north added greatly to the number of units protecting the expedition. The aircraft carrier *Argus* was scheduled to furnish air cover at Bougie until noon, 11 November, when the Eastern Air Command would assume the responsibility. After the capture of the Djidjelli airstrip fighters flown from Maison Blanche airfield would use fuel brought by the convoy and trucked to the airstrip during the morning.

The convoy arrived off Cap Carbon at 0430, 11 November, and proceeded with landing operations on the assumption that a hostile reception was possible. Troops of the 6th Battalion, Royal West Kent Regiment, struggling through heavy surf, came ashore at a point outside the range of the coastal guns. Farther east near Djidjelli, troops who were to take control of the airfield from friendly French and who were to provide fuel and ammunition for Royal Air Force planes which were expected during the day tried to land from the *Awatea.* Because the surf was too heavy, they had to turn west to go ashore at Bougie. There they joined the remainder of the expedition in using the sheltered bay with the permission of the French officer in command. They were about forty miles from the Djidjelli airstrip, too far to capture it in time to make it available for use if the Royal Air Force planes arrived as planned, or to supply fuel.

The *Argus* turned to other duties according to the schedule, and was itself bombed nearer Algiers before the end of the day. The land-based fighters of the Eastern Air Command, which had been held back until the airstrip was finally captured, arrived early on 12 November. Even then they were forced to wait until the next night for gasoline to be brought up. In consequence, the ships a Bougie were without active defense by land- or carrier-based aircraft except for brief patrols by planes which had flown nearly 200 miles to reach the area in time for action on the afternoon of 11 November and all day 12 November. The enemy sank the auxiliary antiaircraft ship *Tynwald,* destroyed the transports *Karanja, Cathay,* and *Awatea,* and damaged the monitor *Roberts* before this operation was completed. Bougie and Djidjelli were occupied, and on 12 November a force consisting of the reinforced 8th Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, was sent to occupy the town and airfield at Sétif.

At dawn, 12 November, the destroyer-transports *Lamberton* and *Wheatland,* with the guidance of a friendly local pilot, slipped into the port of Bône, 125 miles east of Bougie, and put ashore the 6th Commando (reinforced). The unit was at the eastern limits of Algeria, some 185 miles from Bizerte along the coastal highway. Later that day, 312 men of the 3d Battalion, 1st Parachute Regiment (Br.), were dropped from transport planes of the 64th Troop Carrier Group (U.S.) on a small airfield near Bône. Both arrivals were unopposed.[4] This airfield and a second somewhat larger field at Duzerville, although about 130 miles west of Tunis, served as a forward air base for the Eastern Air Command. The port of

[4] Memo, Maj Charles Billingslea for CG Airborne Gp, 15 Nov 42, sub: Parachute opns. AFHQ AG 370–71, Micro Job 24, Reel 79D.

Bône was highly valued by the Allies although within easy bombing range of enemy aircraft from Sardinia and Sicily. Its accommodations for docking at least twenty-two ships, and its railroad connections with La Calle by narrow-gauge track and with Duvivier, on the main Algiers–Tunis line, by standard-gauge electric railway, made it a potentially significant point of transshipment for the heavy stream of supplies and reinforcements to be rushed into Tunisia. (*Map V*)

The Eastern Task Force, moving overland, first penetrated Tunisia at two different points, and at the same time sent a third force to the Algerian border on the southern flank. The British 78th Division on 14 November was ordered to send a mobile task force of infantry with supporting armor, artillery, and combat engineers to move rapidly along the coastal highway from Bône to the port of Tabarka or even farther east. This overland march would be paralleled by two airborne advances next day. The British 1st Parachute Battalion (from AFHQ reserves) was to be sent from Algiers to the railroad center of Souk el Arba. The 2d Battalion, U.S. 509th Parachute Infantry (Col. Edson D. Raff), which had assembled at Maison Blanche after its unfortunate experience at Oran, was to be dropped on the southern flank at Youks-les-Bains, near Tébessa. The three operations would therefore place Allied forces within Tunisia at two northern points, each covering a major route from Algeria, and at the Algerian-Tunisian boundary on the southern flank. At each point, plans called for contacts with the French in the vicinity, reconnaissance, and delaying action against enemy attempts to penetrate farther west.

Youks-les-Bains airfield was occupied by parachutists of the 2d Battalion, 509th Parachute Regiment, who dropped from thirty-three C–47 transports on the morning of 15 November in an improvised operation. The airdrop owed its success to a friendly French reception. The gasoline stocked at the airfield was taken under American protection while the French garrison withdrew to a post about five miles away. Part of Colonel Raff's force then continued to Tébessa.[5]

The airdrop scheduled for Souk el Arba on 15 November had to wait one more day because of weather conditions. By the night of 16 November, Tunisia had been entered at two advanced points, Tabarka and Souk el Arba, where contact was established with General Barré's command at a point one and a half miles west of Bédja. Meanwhile on the northern axis of advance elements of the British 36th Brigade Group had arrived at Djebel Abiod. The troops had found the French to be helpful and well disposed. Behind this first series of eastward movements by sea, ground, and air, the main body of 78th Division started its overland advance from Algiers on 15 November, using motor transport just landed from one of the follow-up convoys. The stage was set for the first tentative contacts between Allied and Axis ground troops. If matters went reasonably well, the Eastern Task Force would be able to make a general advance into Tunisia one week later.[6]

[5] Rpt of airborne opns, 15 Feb 43. OPD 381 Africa (1–27–43) Sec 2, Case 79.

[6] A seaborne attack on Sousse mounted in Malta (Operation BREASTPLATE) and to be made simultaneously with the attack from the west was not attempted because of lack of means to seize the port against resistance. (1) Msg, USFOR to AGWAR, 18 Nov 42, CM-IN 7911. (2) Msg, Eisenhower (in Gibraltar) to Smith (in London), 1129, 16 Nov 42; Msgs G–406 and G–449, Smith to Eisenhower, 16 and 18 Nov 42; Msg NR–862, Eisenhower to Gov of Malta, 2236, 18 Nov 42. Copies in Smith Papers.

The Eastern Air Force was overextended by the effort to meet all its responsibilities during the Eastern Task Force's rapid advance into Tunisia. Convoys at sea as well as ports, airfields, and troop movements in the forward area—all required air protection. For lack of radar ashore, early warning of enemy air attacks could rarely be obtained; therefore daylight fighter patrols had to be continuous. Equipment for improving airfields and maintaining aircraft came eastward haltingly, so that the air effort was carried on within severe limitations. While assembling the Eastern Task Force in position to launch his attack, General Anderson called for heavy and persistent Allied bombing of the ports and airfields near Bizerte and Tunis to cut down the Axis inflow. He also had to have strong air protection for the vital port of Bône in order to guarantee receipt of all sorts of critically needed matériel. Use of air transport to expedite the build-up contributed to the burden on the facilities of the airdromes near Algiers, where congestion hampered efficient performance. Finally the arrangements to co-ordinate air and ground operations were almost frustrated by the marked deficiency in signal communications. General Evelegh's Headquarters, 78th Division, included a Royal Air Force "tentacle" or Advanced Air Signal Corps (comparable to an American air support party), while, to maintain liaison with General Anderson's task force headquarters, the Royal Air Force had provided for a command post headed by Air Commodore G. M. Lawson. This unit was the nucleus of the future 242d Group's staff. Signal communications between these points and the air staff at AFHQ and with the forward airdromes were not working as late as 23 November, when Air Commodore Lawson found the widespread ignorance of organization and the need for energetic rectification most disturbing. The Eastern Air Command had to overcome not only the enemy's advantages but the drawbacks of its own chaotic condition before Allied air power could make itself fully effective.[7]

The Terrain of Tunisia

In moving against northeastern Tunisia, the Allies were faced with an area of great topographical complexity. Bizerte and Tunis are situated in coastal flatlands fringed by hills which project to the seacoast from high and irregular mountain masses lying to the west. Bizerte's basin is relatively small and much of it is submerged under the Lac de Bizerte and the marshy Garaet Ichkeul. The plain adjacent to Tunis is separated from that of Bizerte and is bounded on the northwest, west, and south by the eastern extremities of high mountain ridges. Lower hills rim the Tunis plain at the southwest, between the Medjerda and Miliane rivers. Through this more favorable traversable sector ran the main highway and railroad connecting Algeria with Tunis.

The mountainous region north of the Medjerda river and southwest of Bizerte, an area about fifty miles long and extending inland forty miles from the coast, is separated into five segments by four lesser streams: the Sedjenane, Malah, Djoumine, and Tine. The irregular masses rising between these rivers are covered with a dense scrub in the northern belt from the Sedjenane to the sea. Elsewhere their upper portions are rocky and bare, dark gray in

[7] Info supplied by Air Ministry, London.

color, speckled with shadows, with a trace of green along the brooks nearer the bases. Conditions were favorable to defense. Certain rocky heights gave observation over a wide expanse. On the rounded shoulders of the hills were innumerable excellent sites for mortars. Potential tank routes were few and readily recognized and mined. Outflanking maneuver over the hills would require extraordinary effort. These characteristics were suspected, perhaps, by the approaching Eastern Task Force, but their full import was to be learned the hard way.

The Medjerda valley extends generally southwest to northeast about 125 miles across Tunisia from headwaters beyond the Algerian border to its outlet north of Tunis. It consists of several alluvial plains connected by gorges, and the river for most of its length has steep-sided banks. After heavy rains the clay soil of the fertile plains turned into some of the softest mud known to soldiers. The countryside between the towns was dotted with many French farms and estates, on which were buildings of white and pink stucco, with somewhat fewer villas in classic style. There were also many small Arab villages of gray, mud-and-straw huts. Between Medjez el Bab and Tebourba, the Medjerda ran close to the base of lofty hills, with a narrow shelf from which a railroad and highway continued across the plain to Tunis. The river was bridged at Djedeïda (fifteen miles from Tunis), where the stream turned more sharply northward, and at eight other points farther upstream at intervals of six to ten miles, all within the area in which the Allied troops were to concentrate or to engage the enemy.

Between the Medjerda and Miliane rivers, a highway from Le Kef reached Tunis through Teboursouk, Medjez el Bab, and Massicault. Closer to the Miliane, roads to Tunis from Pont-du-Fahs ran along that stream on either side, and on the southeastern bank near the base of the mountain ridge was also a railroad from Le Kef through Le Sers, Bou Arada, and Pont-du-Fahs to Tunis. It was in the hills north of the Medjerda and along both sides of that valley that the first efforts to reach Tunis and Bizerte were to be made. An Allied thrust along the Medjerda was vulnerable to a southern flank attack delivered from the vicinity of the Miliane. Nevertheless, the Axis defenders of Tunis feared being pinned down while Allied forces pushed to the coast well to the south, and thereby cut the line from Tunis to Tripoli. The topography of central Tunisia gave the defenders more security from such a threat than they perhaps realized.

South of the Miliane the topography is dominated by three connected mountain chains which form a vast, inverted Y. The stem extends northeastward to Cap Bon. The fork is found south of Pont-du-Fahs in the vicinity of the bold Djebel Fkirine (988), a peak rising to more than 3,000 feet. For over 125 miles one prong (the Eastern Dorsal) projects southward to Maknassy, while a still longer extension to the southwest (the Grand, or Western, Dorsal) reaches beyond Fériana. Across the wide southern opening of the Y is the east-west chain on either side of the oasis at Gafsa. Within this great triangular region is an intermediate Tunisian plateau, crossed by a few streams draining the higher ground at the west to the coastal plain at the east.

The intermediate plateau is subdivided by several disconnected and curving ridges which are more or less parallel to the Grand

Dorsal. They are so scattered within the area as to create a group of wide valleys and basins connected by openings between guardian heights. Most of the region receives less than sixteen inches of rainfall annually, and the bulk of that within the winter months, so that the ground is dry and dusty from March to November, though there is enough moisture for forage and agriculture at many points. Orchards, grainfields, and cultivated cactus patches supported a surprisingly large number of small Arab villages and individual European-owned farms.

The coastal plain lies between the Eastern Dorsal and the sea, spreading south of Enfidaville to a width of about seventy miles, narrowing north of Gabès to a bottleneck, and again broadening between the Matmata mountains and the sea, where the coast swings southeasterly to Tripolitania. Shallow lakes and dried-up lake beds are found at numerous points on the coastal plain, while on similarly level terrain extending westward for more than 200 miles from the Gabès gap, salt marshes (chotts) cover about half the surface. Movement north and south on the coastal plain is easy but the narrow gap at Gabès, the neck between Enfidaville and Hammamet farther north, and the defile at Hamman Lif near the base of Cap Bon peninsula, are dominating points of control.

The southern section of barren, undulating desert changed to tableland in the latitudes of Sfax and Sousse and, near Kairouan, could be used with little preparation for airplane landing fields. Water brought by streams and aqueducts from the intermediate plateau was necessary for the agriculture and the townspeople of the coastal plain. Over this area north and south for about 180 miles ran sections of the rail and highway used in November 1942 to connect the Axis Tunisian bridgehead with Tripoli. To reach and cut this Axis line of communications, the Allies had to establish a line of their own reaching southeastward over the mountains of eastern Algeria and central Tunisia. It required the use of port facilities and railroad capacity already being stretched to the full to build up the Eastern Task Force in the Medjerda valley and north of it. The Allied drive on Tunis absorbed almost all available transport and focused their resources on northeastern Tunesia, from Pont-du-Fahs northward.

Because of the rugged topography movement between the interior and the coastal plain is restricted to breaks in the mountain barriers. The intermediate plateau within the flaring arms of the two dorsals can best be reached from the coast through passes in the Eastern Dorsal at Pichon, Fondouk el Aouareb (also known as Fondouk el Okbi), Faïd, and Maknassy, or through a defile east of El Guettar and a broader gap at Gafsa. Transit through the Western Dorsal is somewhat easier and best achieved at openings near Maktar, Sbiba, Kasserine, and Fériana. East-west movement through the central mountain complex north of the intermediate plateau is most practicable along the finger-like extensions of the coastal plain which project into the hills and extend at intermediate altitudes into the higher plateau and mountain ridges. The Goubellat plain between the Medjerda and Miliane rivers, about half way between Medjez el Bab and Pont-du-Fahs, is the most important area thus connected with the coastal zone.

In northern Tunisia the road and railroad routes drew attacking forces along cer-

tain well-defined lines of approach. The coastal road from Tabarka to Mateur was the first. That road was linked with the Medjerda valley routes by a north-south link of almost twenty-five miles connecting Djebel Abiod and Bédja. A secondary road from Bédja ran northeasterly to Sidi Nsir, roughly parallel to a section of the railroad linking Bédja with Mateur, and then struck eastward to the Tine river valley where it sent one branch northward to Mateur and another branch still farther east to link with the Mateur–Chouïgui pass–Tebourba road. Thus a second element of the attacking force could move through Sidi Nsir to the Tine valley and then be in position either to cooperate with a coastal road column in attacking Mateur, or to occupy Chouïgui pass and even join a third attacking element in seizing Tebourba. A third group would have its choice of the road and railway line along the northern bank of the Medjerda river to Tebourba or south of it from Medjez el Bab through Massicault to Tunis. If it drove against Tebourba with its right flank resting on the Medjerda, defensive measures would be required on the other side of the stream, where hills would enable the enemy to harass anyone on the northern bank, and where the Massicault road would serve for a swift thrust against the key communications center of Medjez el Bab.

Bizerte and Tunis were forty miles apart by the direct highway east of Lac de Bizerte and about fifty miles by road and railroad through Mateur and Djedeïda, a route which penetrated the fringe of hills between Mateur and the Tunis plain some ten miles north of Chouïgui pass. Possession of Mateur as the hub of radiating roads and railroad lines not only was essential if Bizerte was to be taken from the interior, but it would also be a great advantage in an attack on Tunis. Possession of Djedeïda, less than fifteen miles from Tunis, would effectively break the railroad link between Tunis and Bizerte and confine the ground link to the highway through Protville. Indeed, any force which could take and hold Djedeïda would be strong enough, presumably, to seize Tunis itself.

Allied Spearheads Engage the Enemy

French troops were located at various points between the forces of the approaching Allies and of the Axis. The latter had been pushing westward into the hills by a series of small encroachments before which General Barré's Tunisian units withdrew under instructions not to permit a premature clash. The withdrawals were accompanied by equivocal French answers to invitations to join the Axis forces and fight the Allies. The Axis accepted each equivocation without an ultimatum as long as Axis forces were only a small miscellaneous assortment incapable of enforcing its demands. What General Barré began as a temporizing measure he continued after the basic decisions by the French in Algiers on 13 November, as long as both sides needed to avoid battle.[8] The French completed their regrouping in northern Tunisia on 17 November.

North of these screening French troops, the first Allied ground engagement with the Germans occurred the same day. At Djebel Abiod, a provisional British unit was then guarding the bridge and highway intersection after a march from Tabarka during the previous night. While it organized defensive positions, a German-Italian armored reconnaissance column approached along the

[8] CSTT Jnl, 13–15 Nov 42.

twisting road from Bizerte and Mateur.[9] At 1430, the two forces clashed. (*Map 4*)

Heavy British artillery fire halted the enemy's advance. The Germans and Italians deployed swiftly and for the next three hours replied with accurate mortar and machine gun fire and with effective shelling from tank guns. At dusk, they retired along the road, having lost one man killed, twenty wounded, and eight tanks knocked out. Allied losses in personnel were considerable. Furthermore, one field gun was destroyed and four were damaged, most of the antitank guns were knocked out, and many carriers and other vehicles were destroyed or badly damaged. The battle which thus began on 17 November continued at intervals during the next two days, with each side receiving reinforcements but neither being able to dislodge the other.[10]

While these elements of the 36th Brigade Group were defending the Djebel Abiod road junction, Hartforce, a mobile fighting and reconnaissance party of about 150 men, carried out a sweeping, independent patrol in the hills south of the Djebel Abiod–Mateur highway. At 1900 hours, 20 November, the force arrived back on the road between Djebel Abiod and Bédja. A few minor engagements with enemy vehicles and patrols had shown that the Germans were still confined to the roads.

A reconnaissance party sent out by the Germans from Mateur toward Bédja on 18 November in three light reconnaissance and three heavy armored cars ran into an ambush laid by about one company of the 1st Parachute Battalion (Br.) near Sidi Nsir. The fight occurred only thirteen miles southwest of Mateur.[11] The enemy force was completely destroyed or captured, but the British had to leave the captured vehicles behind. They were retrieved by another German reconnaissance patrol on the 20th.

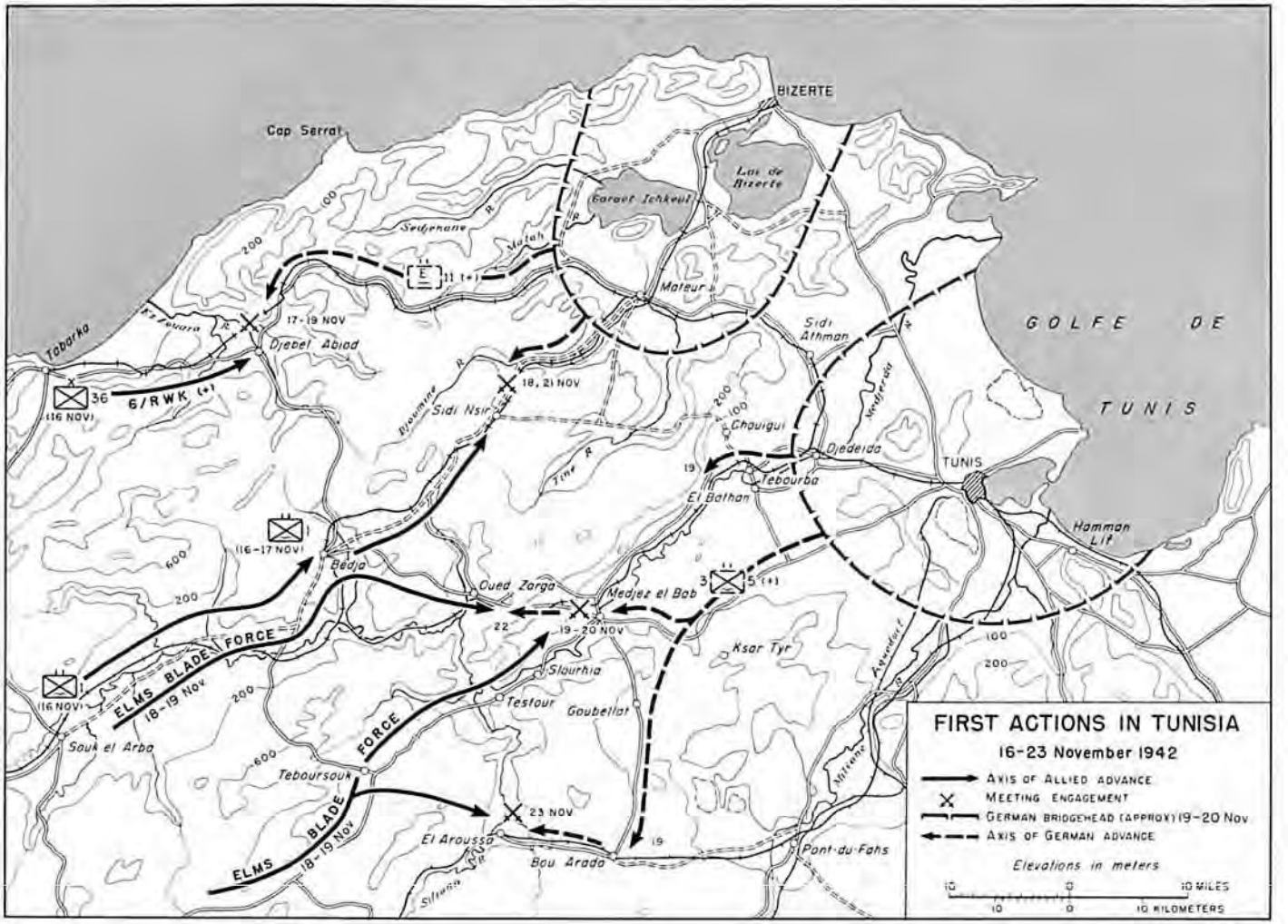
Well on the way toward the general area of these contacts by this time was Blade Force, a provisional formation operating under command of the 78th Division as the main striking group. Its components were drawn from the British 6th Armoured Division, and it resembled an American armored combat command.[12] Blade Force had begun its march from Algiers to Souk Ahras late on 15 November, partly by railroad and partly by motor convoy. It biv-

[9] The British force consisted of: Headquarters and three companies, 6th Battalion, Royal West Kent Regiment (6/RWK); two troops of the 360th Battery, 138th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery; C Squadron, 56th Reconnaissance Regiment, and Hartforce, a provisional unit comprising B Company, Carrier Platoon, and two detachments of the mortar platoon, of the 5th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment. The Axis column, under Maj. Rudolf Witzig, commander of the *11th Parachute Engineer Battalion*, included about fifteen tanks, two companies of parachute engineers, one battery of 105-mm. guns, and a few Italian armored cars.

[10] (1) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (2) *Div. Broich, KTB, Nr. 1, 11.XI.–31.XII.42*, 16–20 Nov 42, and *Anlagenheft I, Anlage 4; Anlagenheft II, Anlage 8.*

[11] Msg, *Div. Broich* to *XC Corps*, 18 Nov 42, in *Div. Broich, KTB, Nr. 1, 11.XI.–31.XII.42, Anlagenheft II, Anlage 8.*

[12] Blade Force was commanded by Col. R. A. Hull and consisted of: 17/21 Lancers Regiment (one modern unit formed by the merger of two former cavalry units); B Squadron, 1st Derbyshire Yeomanry; C Battery, 12th Royal Horse Artillery (mechanized); A Battery, 72d Antitank Regiment; G Troop, 51st Light Antiaircraft Regiment; one troop, 5th Field Squadron, Royal Engineers; B Company, 10th Rifle Brigade. On 18 November, additional units placed under command were: the 5th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment; the 457th Light Battery, Royal Artillery; the 1st Parachute Battalion; and the American 175th Field Artillery Battalion (twelve 25-pounder guns). On 24 November, the 1st Battalion, U.S. 1st Armored Regiment, after coming east from Oran, joined Blade Force at Bédja. Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.


BIZERTE
Cap Serrat
Lac de Bizerte
Garaet Ichkeul
Sedjenane R.
Mateur
Tabarka
Djebel Abiad
17-19 NOV
36
(16 NOV)
6/RWK (+)
11 (+)
18, 21 NOV
Sidi Nsir
Djoumine R.
Sidi Athman
GOLFE DE TUNIS
Chouigui
Djedeida
TUNIS
Tebourba
El Bathan
Tine R.
Medjerda
Hamman Lif
1
(16-17 NOV)
Beja
Oued Zarga
Medjez el Bab
3
5 (+)
19-20 NOV
22
Ksar Tyr
Slaourhia
Testour
Goubellat
Aqueduct
1
(16 NOV)
ELMS BLADE FORCE
18-19 Nov
Souk el Arba
Teboursouk
ELMS BLADE FORCE
18-19 Nov
23 NOV
El Aroussa
Bou Arada
19
Pont-du-Fahs
Siliana
Miliane
FIRST ACTIONS IN TUNISIA
16-23 November 1942
AXIS OF ALLIED ADVANCE
MEETING ENGAGEMENT
GERMAN BRIDGEHEAD (APPROX) 19-20 Nov
AXIS OF GERMAN ADVANCE
Elevations in meters
10 0 10 MILES
10 0 10 KILOMETERS

MAP 4

ouacked near Souk Ahras during the night of 17–18 November, preparing to resume its advance next morning to the vicinity of Bédja, Medjez el Bab, and Le Kef. A fragment of Blade Force, including the 175th Field Artillery Battalion (U.S.), reached Medjez el Bab to reinforce the French during the afternoon of 18 November and the following night. Fighting would extend southward from Djebel Abiod and Sidi Nsir to Medjez el Bab in a matter of hours.

Nehring Takes Command in Tunis

On 17 November, General Nehring, who had arrived the day before, opened his command post as Commanding General, German *XC Corps,* in the former U.S. consulate in Tunis. No German signal communications had been arranged, and the French telephone system was being used despite the risk of hostile surveillance. Transportation was supplied chiefly by hired French automobiles. No chief of staff was yet on hand. No one could tell Nehring exactly which units had arrived, where they were, or who commanded them.

General Nehring established two separate bridgeheads, one temporarily under Colonel Harlinghausen, the Luftwaffe officer in command at Tunis, and a second under a new commander at Bizerte, Lt. Col. Stolz, each directly responsible to Nehring.[13]

[13] Stolz had replaced Col. Hans Lederer at Bizerte on 16 November and on 18 November was himself superseded by Col. Fritz Freiherr von Broich. Stolz then took command of the troops at Mateur. Colonel Harlinghausen on 18 November was relieved by Lt. Col. Koch, commander of the *5th Parachute Regiment* at Tunis, freeing Harlinghausen for his primary air mission. Harlinghausen also retained command of the antiaircraft troops and the units in Sousse, Sfax, and Gabès. (1) *Div. Broich, KTB, Nr. 1, 11.XI.–31.XII.42,* 16–18 Nov 42. (2) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42,* 18 Nov 42.

Nehring ordered expansion of the Bizerte bridgehead to the west and reconnaissance as far along the coast as Tabarka; in addition, he accepted Admiral Derrien's promise to defend Bizerte against Anglo-American attack in a sector to be occupied solely by French troops. All but one company of German infantry and some German and Italian antiaircraft units in Bizerte were thus released for commitment west of the city. On the advice of Dr. Rudolph Rahn, the Nazi diplomatic agent in Tunis, and in the light of his own observations, General Nehring continued to expect no more than passive neutrality from Estéva, Barré, and even Derrien.[14]

On 17 November, Nehring and Rahn recommended that Estéva be immediately relieved of his post as Resident General. He had induced them to consider him well disposed to the Axis, but he proved completely undecided and incapable of making even the simplest decisions in matters of administration and supply. At the same time, they recommended prompt execution of Admiral Platon's proposed arrangement for sending General Henri F. Dentz to Tunisia as a special representative with extensive powers from Marshal Pétain, a step which they believed would contribute to winning over General Barré and his Tunis Division from passive neutrality (for they had persuaded him to revoke orders to his troops to fire on Axis forces) to active collaboration.[15]

The aggressive reconnaissance to the west

[14] (1) *Div. Broich, KTB, Nr. 1, 11.XI.–31.XII.42,* 15–18 Nov 42. (2) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42,* 15–18 Nov 42.

[15] Rad, *Ag Ausland Nr. Sp. 47/42 geh. Ausl I (A3) O. v. D.,* 18 Nov 42, *to WFSt/Atlas* and others; Rad, *Abw IM WEST S No. 47564/42g,* 17 Nov 42, to *Chef Amt Ausl/Abw.* Both in *OKW/Ag Ausland II A5, Alliierte Landing,* in *Franzoesisch-Nordafrika am 8 November 1942, Band I.*

which Nehring directed Colonel Stolz's force to undertake was pushed from Mateur toward Tabarka on 17 November, resulting in the engagement at Djebel Abiod already described.

The First Battle at Medjez el Bab, 19–20 November

Allied concentration of forces in northern Tunisia was observed and in some instances attacked by Axis aircraft, from whose reports it became apparent to Nehring that the test in the Medjerda valley must soon occur. Most pressing was the situation in Medjez el Bab, to which Col. Guy Le Coulteux de Caumont's group had retired on the morning of 17 November, closely pursued by about 300 tough German Air Force troops of the *3d Battalion, 5th Parachute Regiment,* under the command of Capt. Wilhelm Knoche. The town was at the easternmost projection of a French-held quadrilateral of which Bédja, Teboursouk, and Souk el Arba formed the other points. The time for the showdown on Barré's attitude had arrived. By previous arrangement, General Barré came to Medjez el Bab from Souk el Arba at 0400, 19 November, to meet an emissary from Dr. Rahn, who gave him an ultimatum from General Nehring: French troops must withdraw again to the meridian of Tabarka, thus freeing much of Tunisia, or hostilities against them would begin at 0700. Barré's offer to give his decision at 0700 was recognized at Nehring's headquarters as an effort to gain more time before openly joining the Allies.[16] Yet the Germans made one more effort to avoid conflict. Another order, direct from Marshal Pétain, was transmitted through Admiral Estéva to General Barré, forbidding him to fire against Axis forces. This renewed directive was obtained from Vichy after three unsuccessful attempts by the Germans on 18–19 November to persuade the general to execute earlier orders of similar purport.[17] Axis air reconnaissance over the Medjez el Bab area revealed the presence of an Allied force—the observer saw a number of vehicles and was challenged by American antiaircraft fire. German ground troops were therefore ordered to be ready to make a morning attack, in co-ordination with dive bombers, on the troops defending both the town and its important bridge over the Medjerda river.[18]

Small forces were at hand for the first battle for Medjez el Bab. Colonel Le Coulteux deferred the actual outbreak of hostilities as long as possible in expectation of strong Allied reinforcements. During the night of 18–19 November he received from Blade Force one American field artillery battalion (the 175th) in addition to small British armored and infantry detachments.[19]

[16] (1) Giraud Hq, Rapport des opérations, pp. 6–7. (2) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.,* 18 and 19 Nov 42. (3) MS # D–323, *Meine Erlebnisse im Tunesien—Feldzug, November 1942 bis Januar 1943* (Captain Wilhelm Knoche).

[17] Rpt, *German Armistice Commission, Wiesbaden, 20.XI.42, 15.00,* in *OKW/WFSt, Sonderakte, Vorgaenge Frankreich.*

[18] *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.,* 19 Nov 42.

[19] The 175th Field Artillery Battalion (Lt. Col. Joseph E. Kelly) with 175 rounds of 25-pounder ammunition for each of its twelve guns, with six days' rations, and with some .50-caliber machine guns mounted on its trucks, was sent east at 0800, 16 November, with the British 78th Division, expecting to support an armored force, either British or American. Col. R. A. Hull, commanding Blade Force, sent the battalion, operating under the command of Lt. Col. S. J. L. Hill of the 1st Parachute Battalion (Br.) to reach Medjez el Bab by early morning, 19 November, to assist the French in holding the bridge. French liaison officers guided the battalion to Medjez el Bab, where the batteries were ready to fire before daylight. See 175th FA Bn War Diary, 8 Nov 42–1 Mar 43.

Shortly after 0900, 19 November, the Germans broke off all parleys and their attack became merely a question of time. About 0915, the battle opened with an exchange of small arms, mortar, and artillery fire. Beginning about 1045 the Germans were aided by Stukas, the enemy air formations bombing and strafing the battle area at two-hour intervals. The defenders successfully threw back small-scale infantry assaults after two of these air attacks, but heavy casualties and reduced ammunition stocks threatened to make the town untenable without reinforcements. Reinforcements were not forthcoming, for First Army's instructions were to avoid frittering away Allied strength and to conserve all possible means for the final push eastward in a few more days.[20] The Germans received only three truckloads of Italian reinforcements during the afternoon, but after darkness sent detachments to swim the stream and to fight on the northern bank. An attack with increasing strength was successfully simulated.[21] The Allies fell back from the bridge, which they left intact.

Shortly before midnight the commander of the 1st Parachute Battalion, Lt. Col. S. J. L. Hill, summoned Colonel Le Coulteux to his command post at Oued Zarga and informed him that a general withdrawal should begin without delay. The troops at Medjez el Bab were ordered to take positions on the high ground some three miles east of Oued Zarga, a strong natural line astride the road to Bédja. The retirement was well advanced before daylight, and by early afternoon the new line was organized. The enemy occupied Medjez el Bab soon after it was evacuated, but did not follow toward Oued Zarga until more than a day had passed.[22] Enemy air, however, did bomb Bédja most severely on 20 November, inflicting many casualties among both soldiers and civilians. On 22 November, Axis ground troops were stopped east of Oued Zarga and Slourhia by defense forces.[23]

The Enemy Attempts To Extend the Bridgehead

While the Allies were concentrating near Bédja in preparation for their major attack, they felt the sting of Axis air strikes and the fire power of probing motorized columns. The enemy tried to delay the progress of the Eastern Task Force by bombing port areas and roads near Bône, La Calle, and Tabarka, and the roads radiating from Bédja. He used every precious day to the utmost in accumulating enough means successfully to defend the Tunisia bridgehead. He organized defensive perimeters around Tunis and Bizerte, and established blocking positions in depth along the routes which led into them. Farther to the west and southwest, Axis reconnaissance forces kept testing Allied local strength.

Although General Nehring's primary mission was to consolidate his hold on the main bridgehead, he was also responsible for organizing the protection, as far as Gabès, of the long overland line of communications from the bridgehead to Tripoli. The importance of this route to the Axis forces could hardly be exaggerated. Yet Nehring felt he lacked the means to carry out both missions.

[20] 175th FA Bn War Diary, pp. 21–28; Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[21] MS # D-323 (Knoche).

[22] (1) CSTT Jnl, 19–20 Nov 42. (2) Command of the *3d Parachute Battalion* at Medjez el Bab had passed to a Captain Schirmer, who knew the terrain to the west only by map. MS # D-323 (Knoche).

[23] CSTT Jnl, 22 Nov 42.

He remained apprehensive that while he was holding the northeastern tip of Tunisia, the Allies might outflank him farther south and seize a segment of the coastal corridor. His orders to forestall such an operation were underscored during personal visits to his headquarters by Kesselring on 17 and 20 November, and by Generale di Brigata Antonio Gandin, liaison officer from the *Comando Supremo,* on 19 November. Mussolini's deep concern that the line of communications to Rommel's army should remain unbroken was then stressed.[24]

Small German garrisons occupied Sousse, Sfax, and Gabès on 17–18 November. On 20 November, Italian troops from Tripoli reached Gabès after an overland march. Other Italians coming by railroad from Tunis, despite delays by sabotage, reached Sfax on 21 November. To impede any Allied thrust toward Gabès or Sfax, demolition teams parachuted at night far to the west along the roads between Gafsa and Tébessa. Armored reconnaissance patrols, followed by small security detachments, entered the intervening area. A German airborne demolition team landed near Gafsa on the evening of 20 November while an Italian armored and motorized force was heading toward Gafsa over the main road from Gabès. The garrison in Gafsa, a French command and a small detachment of Colonel Raff's 2d Battalion, 509th Parachute Regiment, retired to Fériana after being alerted by telephone. On 22 November, somewhat reinforced, it returned to Gafsa, drove out the Germans, and continued toward Gabès. It encountered the Italian motorized column near El Guettar and sent it hurrying back to its base of operations. Another Allied detachment headed toward Sbeïtla to check the penetration there of an Axis force from the northeast.[25]

Sbeïtla, a community partly ancient and partly modern, was very briefly held by the enemy. An armored German column on 21 November cleared the way for an Italian security detachment to occupy Kairouan, east of the mountains, and next day broke through one of the passes and drove a weaker French garrison out of Sbeïtla. But after this German force had started back to Tunis, via Siliana and Pont-du-Fahs, leaving an Italian group in possession of Sbeïtla, a detachment of Colonel Raff's command suddenly struck at midday and turned the tables. It expelled the Italians, a stronger French force took up the defense of Sbeïtla, and Raff's detachment withdrew to Kasserine and Fériana.[26] The enemy made one unsuccessful attempt on 24 November to regain Sbeïtla but thereafter accepted the fact that he lacked the means. These forays and others demonstrated that neither adversary was then prepared to undertake any sustained offensive action in central Tunisia.[27]

The defensibility of the Axis bridgehead in northeastern Tunisia would have been

[24] (1) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42,* 17–21 Nov 42. (2) *SKL/1. Abt, KTB, Teil A, 1.–30.XI. 42,* 18–21 Nov 42. (3) *Lageorientierung Nordafrika, OKH/Op Abt, Nr. 24253/42.* 18 Nov 42, *Lageorientierungen vom 5.XI.–31.XII.42.* (4) MS # D-147, *Die I. Phase der Kaempfe in Tunesien bis zur Uebernahme des Oberbefehls durch das neugebildete OberKommando der 5.Pz Armee am 9.XII.1942, Teil II* (Nehring).

[25] (1) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42,* 20–23 Nov 42. (2) AFHQ, G–3 Rpts, 8–30 Nov 42, Rpt No. 15, 22 Nov 42. (3) XIX Corps Jnl, 15 Nov 42–13 May 43, entries 20–23 Nov 42. (4) 701st TD Bn AAR, 24 Sep 43. (5) Col. Edson D. Raff, *We Jumped to Fight* (New York, 1944), pp. 91ff. (6) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[26] Raff, *We Jumped to Fight,* p. 111, citing Co B, 701st TD Bn (Capt Gilbert Ellman).

[27] *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42,* 19–24 Nov 42.



SBEITLA

greatly enhanced if it could have been expanded far enough inland to provide room for maneuver. The Commander in Chief, South, urged General Nehring to push westward beyond Medjez el Bab as closely as possible to the area of the current Allied concentration. Nehring, however, sought first to insure that the close-in defenses of Bizerte and Tunis were strong. On 21 November, he established two sectors in the perimeter around Tunis, assigning responsibility for the southern sector to the Italians and for the northern to Colonel Stolz, whose command in Mateur was taken over by Col. Walther Barenthin. Djedeïda was to be a key point in the perimeter, and its airfield was made ready as a forward base of Axis close air support operations. Mateur remained a base for motorized screening patrols extending toward the area held by the Allies. On 21 November, one such column approached Bédja via Sidi Nsir at the same time that the Axis occupants of Medjez el Bab were feeling out Allied strength in the same general area. The column was stopped short by a French defensive force consisting of the 2d Battalion, 15th Regiment of Senegalese Infantry, reinforced by one 47-mm. gun and one 25-mm. gun. The larger weapon knocked out four Italian tanks and caused the others to retire, while French counterattacks against one flank of the

Italian motorized infantry drove off the rest of the force.[28]

Southwest of Tunis, Axis security detachments had been established in Zarhouan and Pont-du-Fahs as early as 19 November and mobile detachments had been active in the Tebourba–El Bathan and Goubellat–Bou Arada areas. On 20 November, while enemy elements were overcoming French resistance in Medjez el Bab, other elements occupied Ksar Tyr. By 23 November, their probing in the region south of the Medjerda reached the vicinity of El Aroussa.[29] There a reconnaissance party from the *5th Parachute Regiment* was thrown back by one Allied infantry battalion supported by an estimated nine to twelve British tanks. Stukas struck the Allied troops, but the Axis ground units, like those of the Eastern Task Force, were then under strict orders not to jeopardize their resources in aggressive attacks. They had been directed to husband their tanks and heavy guns in order to remain capable of defending a line which General Nehring would designate later. They withdrew.

By 24 November, the German-Italian forces had enlarged the Axis bridgehead as much as General Nehring believed they could. He thereupon elected to await the expected Allied attack before resuming counterthrusts toward western Tunisia.[30]

Preparations for the First Allied Attack

The Eastern Task Force set 21 or 22 November as the earliest date for the beginning of its general advance. In preparation, Allied ground troops took up forward positions on a general line running southward from Djebel Abiod through Sidi Nsir, Oued Zarga, Testour, and El Aroussa. General Anderson on 21 November doubted the ability of his available forces to reach Tunis against the enemy's supposed strength. After visiting the forward area, Anderson returned to his Algiers headquarters to appraise the situation, particularly the significance of reported German moves on his southern flank, and to make certain that his attack, once it began, would get off to a good start.[31]

Although Axis strength and dispositions in Tunisia were then imperfectly known at Eastern Task Force headquarters, the rapidity of the Axis build-up and the numbers of armored vehicles and defensive weapons which were believed to be at the enemy's disposal greatly exceeded the estimates of the preinvasion planners. In order for the Allies to cope with this increased enemy strength, a change was necessary in the composition of General Anderson's command, which had been limited to units of the British First Army, supported by squadrons of the Royal Air Force. To strengthen his forces, mobile American units were also drawn into Tunisia. Artillery, light and medium tanks, tank destroyers, armored infantry, and related elements were sent forward from Algiers and Oran, while fighter and bomber squadrons of the XII Air Support Command were shifted eastward in small numbers. Artillery battalions from the 39th and 168th Regimental Combat Teams at Algiers were the first to arrive. Elements of Combat

[28] (1) CSTT Jnl, 22 Nov 42. (2) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42,* 20–22 Nov. 42.

[29] MS # D-086, *Die 1. Phase der Kaempfe in Tunesien bis zur Uebernahme des Befehls durch das neugebildete OberKommando der 5.Pz.armee am 9.XII.42, Teil I (Nehring).*

[30] *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42,* 23–24 Nov 42.

[31] (1) Rpt, CG ETF (Jemmapes) to AFHQ, (and Br. War Office), 2200, 22 Nov 42. Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (2) Br. First Army Opn Instruc 6, 21 Nov 42. DRB AGO.

Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, started eastward on 15 November by road and railroad with the prospect of piecemeal commitment, but General Oliver, its commander, convinced Generals Clark and Eisenhower that it should all be employed as a balanced armored team even if many of its lighter tracked vehicles had to go 700 miles with the wheeled vehicles by road. Some elements rode from Algiers to Bône by sea. By 27 November, all units except Company C, 13th Armored Regiment, had left Oran and been attached to the Eastern Task Force, and were coming close to the area of combat. In fact, some were already there. American tank units were included in each of the major elements of the Eastern Task Force when the first attack began, while headquarters and other elements of Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, were on hand during the final phase.[32]

The line of communications to the Eastern Task Force remained in a rudimentary state of organization. Its headquarters under Maj. Gen. J. G. W. Clark (Br.) opened in Algiers on 17 November, and moved forward to Sétif on 28 November. From a junction point at Souk Ahras, the railway line ran south to Tébessa, supply base for the Tunisian Task Force on the southern flank, and eastward to Souk el Arba, the railhead for the main offensive. Trains made the journey from Algiers to Souk el Arba in from four to six days. Nine trains a day could be accommodated, with one hauling the minimum requirements for civilian supply and two carrying coal to electric generating stations and to locomotive refueling points. The remaining six, hauling military



CREW OF A GENERAL GRANT TANK *heating field rations at Souk el Arba, 23 November 1942.*

supplies, were supplemented by as much coastal traffic as possible. Despite the hazards of air attack on ships using the port of Bône, and the actual damage to piers and cranes, Bône became the point of transshipment of supplies bound for La Calle (the base for the forces on the extreme northern wing) and of men and matériel en route to Souk el Arba via Duvivier and Souk Ahras. In an effort to unload ships rapidly and send them out to the greater safety of open waters, the port commanders permitted congestion to develop which could be removed only by devoting all available trucks and labor to port clearance. Motor transport was everywhere far below normal requirements for an assault. Neither the 78th Division nor the elements of the British 6th Armoured Division, therefore, nor the American units which were brought

[32] (1) Intervs with Gens Oliver and Robinett, 11 Jan. 51. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

eastward to reinforce them, had the full allowance of organic transportation. What they did have—and this was supplemented by requisitioned French civilian vehicles, "every kind of scrawny vehicle that can run," as General Eisenhower described them—was worked to the limit.[33]

Motor traffic was hampered by the deterioration of the roads under heavy use and by the necessity of one-way movement on some bridges and along narrow stretches between soft shoulders. The Eastern Task Force's road control system was in operation on 13 November. Gasoline consumption ran ahead of estimates, in part because requirements of the American reinforcements had not been taken into account. A serious shortage was eased by release to the Allies of a French reserve stock of aviation gasoline. The piling up of matériel in the ports had its counterpart at the Souk el Arba railhead after that had been open four or five days. As the offensive was about to begin, carloads of ammunition and other essential matériel had accumulated there and remained neither unloaded, separated, nor organized for issue. Both motor transport and labor were insufficient. The 1st Battalion, 39th Infantry, and later, the 3d Battalion, 39th Infantry, were drawn from Algiers to points along the line of communications and employed not only as guards but as service units.[34]

The Allied offensive was prepared during a period of increasing air clashes, and it involved an unexpected commitment of Twelfth Air Force units to operations in Tunisia. The abbreviated conflict of 8–11 November left enough surplus stocks of aviation fuel and ammunition at the ports for a vigorous air effort. Offsetting that advantage was the shortage of vehicles for transporting these stocks to the airfields, the "loss" by ground personnel of servicing equipment during transit, and the fact that there were few and relatively distant airfields in forward areas. General Anderson's close air support was to be furnished from the fields at Souk el Arba (80 miles from Tunis), Bône (135 miles from Tunis), and Youks-les-Bains (155 miles from Tunis). While fighter and fighter-bomber squadrons were being brought forward to use these fields, the ports from Algiers to Bône and the Allied air base at Maison Blanche had to be protected from the enemy. On 16 November B–17F heavy bombers of the U.S. 97th Bombardment Group began a series of raids from Maison Blanche on the Sidi Ahmed airfield at Bizerte, the El Aouina airfield near Tunis, and toward the Elmas airfields near Cagliari in Sardinia.

German and Italian air units confined road movements east of Souk el Arba to the hours of darkness and repeatedly bombed Bedja, Teboursouk, Souk el Khemis, and other forward centers. Enemy bombers struck the Algiers harbor and airfields heavily on the evenings of 20 and 21 November, compelling the B–17's to withdraw to Tafaraoui near Oran. Thereafter they had to make roundtrip flights of 1,200 miles to strike Bizerte or Tunis, picking up fighter escort for the flight east of Algiers. Night fighters, aided by radar and a balloon barrage, were brought in to defend Algiers. Although the Flying Fortresses were forced

[33] (1) Ltr, Eisenhower to Marshall, 30 Nov 42. WDCSA 384 Africa. (2) Msg, CAO AFHQ to QMG AFHQ. Copy in AF Archives, Hist Office File 520.2132.

[34] (1) 39th Inf Hist, 1942, 23 Oct 43. (2) Lt Col Frank J. Redding, Jr., The Operations of C Company, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, 24 November–11 December 1942, MS. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia, 1948–49.

back, other units came forward. At Youks-les-Bains, a squadron of the U.S. 14th Fighter Group (P–38's) arrived on 21 November to operate on the southern wing in support of the Tunisian task force and to be available for missions in support of British 78th Division after 27 November. One squadron of light bombers (DB–7's) came in later.[35]

After the Allied attack began, the Eastern Task Force could expect close support from the two squadrons (thirty-six aircraft) of Royal Air Force Spitfires which were stationed at Souk el Arba, two squadrons of Spitfires and one of Hurribombers at Bône (Duzerville) airfield, and five squadrons of light and medium bombers at Blida airdrome near Algiers or at the intermediate airfields at Sétif and Canrobert. Reserves of fighters and light or medium bombers were available at Tafaraoui or Gibraltar. The Twelfth Air Force units at Youks-les-Bains could be diverted to the operation along the Medjerda river from missions farther south. Photographic reconnaissance would be negligible. Provision for maintenance would be little better.

The plans for air co-operation on the afternoon of 24 November, and for several days following, called for bombing the ports and airfields at Bizerte and Tunis from all quarters by Royal Air Force units, including those based at Malta, supplemented by others from the XII Bomber Command. All air units actually stationed in the forward fields were to be subject to direct calls for assistance from Headquarters, Eastern Task Force, through Air Marshal Welsh, who would transmit requests for American air missions to Headquarters, Twelfth Air Force (General Doolittle).[36]

[35] Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces,* II, 83–86.

Enemy Strength

The ground forces under General Nehring's command when the Allies' attack began on 25 November totaled about 15,575 German and 9,000 Italian troops. They were organized in separate zones around Bizerte and Tunis, and were supplemented by a small reserve held in the Tunis area in readiness for reconnaissance or counterattack.

Within the two portions of the bridgehead German troops predominated. Italian troops were assigned to the *Tunis South* sector and to many small Axis groups in contact with the Allies at forward points between the northern coastal highway and the area of patrolling west of Sfax and Kairouan. Admiral Derrien's French naval forces manned the coastal batteries in the Bizerte area and one of the batteries defending Tunis. Italian naval units held the remainder. The French Army detachment which Derrien kept near Bizerte had no separate mission, and remained a source of anxiety. Nehring on 25 November appointed the commander of the *10th Panzer Division,* Generalmajor Wolfgang Fischer, who had arrived in Tunis the previous day, as *Military Governor (Militaerbefehlshaber) of Bizerte,* and directed him to make sure of the loyalty of the French troops. Although Admiral Derrien convinced General Fischer of their reliability, Kesselring re-

[36] (1) *Ibid.* (2) Msg, Eisenhower to Smith, 24 Nov 42; Msgs, Smith to Eisenhower, 24 and 25 Nov 42; Memo, sub: Location of Allied aircraft in theater used by CofS at 25 Nov 42 session of COS; Msgs, Eisenhower to Gen Ismay, 30 May 42. AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

mained skeptical, and ordered Nehring to take precautions against French defection.

The German ground elements consisted of two parachute infantry regiments, one with two infantry battalions and one with one infantry and one antitank battalion; a battalion of parachute engineers; an air force guard battalion and three Army field battalions, originally destined as replacements for Rommel's forces; one tank battalion and part of another; two reconnaissance companies, one with armored cars carrying 75-mm. guns; a motorcycle company; one motorized antitank company; one field artillery battalion; and about two and a half antiaircraft artillery battalions, whose armament included twenty of the new 88-mm. dual-purpose guns.

Italian elements of Nehring's *XC Corps* had by 25 November come to include three regiments of infantry; two assault gun and two antitank gun battalions; and various service units amounting to about one fifth of the total Italian forces ultimately designated for Tunisia (47,000 men, 148 guns, 8 assault guns, 2,700 tanks and trucks, 1,500 motorcycles, and 204 prime movers). The first of the Italian divisions in Tunisia was the *Superga Division,* commanded by Generale di Division Dante Lorenzelli. Elements of the Italian *XXX Corps* (Generale di Corpo d'Armata Vittorio Sogno) had also begun to arrive.

The Axis ground troops in Tunisia were supported by five groups of fighters (one Italian), one group of dive bombers, and one squadron of short-range reconnaissance aircraft. These planes were based on the airfields of Bizerte, Tunis, and Djedeïda. Bombers used fields in Sicily and Sardinia to strike Tunisian targets.[37]

The *XC Corps* front extended from northeast of Djebel Abiod to the Mateur defense perimeter, along the Mateur–Djedeïda road and railroad to St. Cyprien, La Mohammedia, and a road junction five miles east-southeast of Hammam Lif, with detachments in Sousse, Sfax, and Gabès. By shifting some forces southeastward from the vicinity of Mateur, and pulling others back from advanced positions in Goubellat, El Aroussa, and Medjez el Bab, Nehring had also organized an inner ring of strongpoints protecting Tunis.[38]

Allied Plan of Attack

The Allied offensive was intended to drive back the enemy forces, to separate those near Bizerte from those near Tunis, to capture the latter, and then to hem in the Bizerte bridgehead, hamper its reinforcement, and build up the means to force it to capitulate. With the surrender of Bizerte, Operation TORCH would terminate.

When the Eastern Task Force, alternatively referred to as the British First Army, began its attack it consisted only of the 78th Division with elements of the 6th Armoured Division and miscellaneous other units attached, plus a line of communications. The British 5 Corps headquarters arrived in Algiers with the third fast convoy on 22 November but did not move up and assume its mission until after the first attack had been made. Anderson's army headquarters in Algiers, with a forward

[37] (1) Compilation, *Truppen fuer Tunis,* 13 Nov 42, and rpt, *Die eigenen Verbaende in Tunesien nach dem Stand vom 27.XI.42,* 28 Nov 42. Both in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt,* File *Tunis, 10.XI.42–2.V.43.* (2) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42,* 15–25 Nov 42. The *Superga Division,* after participating in the invasion of France in 1940, had been retrained in 1942 as an amphibious infantry division.

[38] *XC Corps, KTB, I, 16.–30.XI.42,* 24–26 Nov 42.

command post at Jemmapes, dealt directly with General Evelegh's division headquarters at Rhardimaou and on 22–23 November at Souk el Khemis. Principal subordinate elements of the 78th Division were the 36th Infantry Brigade, Blade Force, and 11th Infantry Brigade, commanded, respectively, by Brig. A. L. Kent-Lemon, Col. R. A. Hull, and Brig. E. E. E. Cass.[39] On 23 November General Anderson directed General Evelegh to secure the line Mateur–Tebourba as soon as possible. Next day, the 78th Division issued a plan of attack setting the opening phase for that same night.[40]

General Evelegh's plan was to move his forces eastward to the objective line in three widely separated columns, two of which would converge in the vicinity of Tebourba. (*Map 5*) These three columns were to consist of the British 36th Infantry Brigade Group on the left (north), Blade Force in the center, and the 11th Infantry Brigade Group on the right, each reinforced by American armored and artillery units. To seize Medjez el Bab and advance along the northwestern bank of the Medjerda river, he designated the 11th Infantry Brigade Group, protected at first by detached elements of Blade Force. The main body of Blade Force, including the 1st Battalion, U.S. 1st Armored Regiment of light tanks, was to thread its way through the mountains past Sidi Nsir into the valley of the upper Tine river and thence via Chouïgui pass in the eastern hills onto the plain northwest of Tebourba. During this advance it would block any hostile blow against the Allied northern flank, and might grasp an opportunity to seize Mateur, but it was expected to seize the bridges over the Medjerda river at El Bathan, south of Tebourba, and at Djedeïda, northeast of it. Subsequently, it would turn over defense of these bridges to the 11th Infantry Brigade Group.

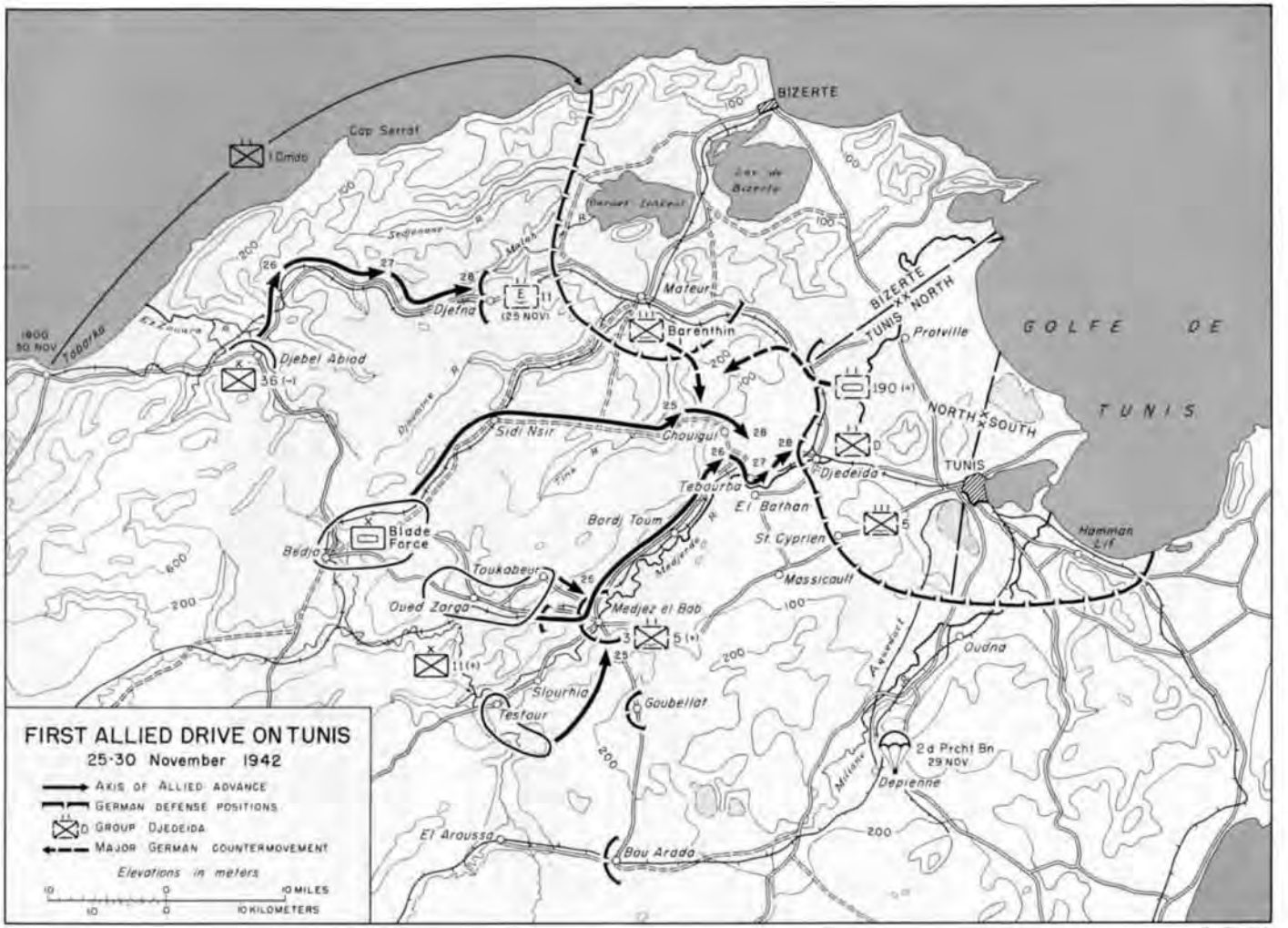
Beginning during the night of 24–25 November, the 36th Infantry Brigade Group was to proceed eastward from Djebel Abiod along the twisting road to Mateur and Bizerte. While it appeared to threaten Mateur, its ultimate objective in exploiting successes was a section of road from a major road junction six miles west-northwest of Mateur to the bridge over the Sedjenane river seven miles farther north, possession of which would block one of the main routes between Bizerte and Mateur. Execution of these missions would complete the first phase of the Allied attack.

On the night of 25–26 November, as the first step of the next phase, the 11th Infantry Brigade Group was expected to leave one reinforced battalion to hold Tebourba, El Bathan, and Djedeïda, and to move the main body to an assembly area south of Mateur. Supported by all available artillery, and with Blade Force in 78th Division reserve, the infantry was to attack Mateur on 26 November. During this phase, the southeastern flank would be protected by a mobile armored force (part British and part American) and by French infantry, as a responsibility of General Barré.

Once the Allies held Tebourba and Mateur, with the important river crossings near them, the final attack could be launched from the new base line. The plan for those operations was withheld for later issuance in the light of intervening events. Royal Air Force units were to provide tactical air reconnaissance under 78th Division control, mainly to observe the movements of Axis reserves and, through a control unit with the

[39] These brigade groups corresponded in strength to an American regiment or regimental combat team.

[40] 78th Div Opns Instruc 1, 24 Nov 42.


BIZERTE
Cap Serrat
I Cmdo
Djefna
(25 NOV)
Mateur
Baregthin
BIZERTE NORTH
TUNIS
Protville
GOLFE DE TUNIS
Djebel Abiod
36 (-)
190 (+)
NORTH
SOUTH
Sidi Nsir
Chouigui
Djedeida
TUNIS
Tebourba
El Bathan
Bordj Toum
Blade Force
Bedja
St Cyprien
Hamman Lif
Toukabeur
Massicault
Oued Zarga
Medjez el Bab
Oudna
Slourhia
Testour
Goubellat
2d Prcht Bn
29 NOV
Depienne
El Aroussa
Bou Arada
FIRST ALLIED DRIVE ON TUNIS
25-30 November 1942
AXIS OF ALLIED ADVANCE
GERMAN DEFENSE POSITIONS
GROUP DJEDEIDA
MAJOR GERMAN COUNTERMOVEMENT
Elevations in meters
10 0 10 MILES
10 0 10 KILOMETERS

MAP 5

division, to provide such cover as one fighter squadron could furnish for the daylight advance by Blade Force and its concentration near Chouïgui.[41]

This plan had some recognizable weaknesses, attributable partly to postponing selection of the zone of attack in the next phase, and partly to disregarding the relationship of the terrain to the utilization of armored units. Attached to the 36th Infantry Brigade Group in the mountains was a company of medium tanks which it could never use. Blade Force lacked infantry and was consequently unable to cope with some normal tactical situations. If the 36th Infantry Brigade Group had been limited to a holding attack, it could have spared some of its infantry for employment with Blade Force. The mountains which separated Blade Force from the 11th Infantry Brigade Group intervened at least as completely as would the Medjerda river if Blade Force had been sent forward southeast of it while the 11th Infantry Brigade used the road along the northwestern bank. The main road from Medjez el Bab through Furna and Massicault to Tunis, with side roads to various river crossings, ran through terrain on which armored units could maneuver. A blocking detachment near Sidi Nsir might have protected Bédja while releasing forces to make the assault on Tunis with the main effort on the right (southeast). Finally, the plans forfeited any possibility of surprise; Nehring could ascertain the zone of major Allied offensive effort and consolidate his defenses accordingly. No plan could have made better use of the inadequate Allied air support except, perhaps, to husband rather than overextend it.

Command over French troops was not yielded to General Anderson, but was exercised by General Juin as Commander in Chief of French Forces on the Tunisian Front. A boundary between the area of joint operations of the British First Army and French Tunisian Troops and the operations of the French XIX Corps was specified as the line from Montesquieu on the west through Tadjerouine and Ksour to Maktar. North of it, General Juin was to deal directly with General Barré and to co-ordinate French operations with those of General Anderson's force. South of the line, where his command would be exercised through General Koeltz of French XIX Corps, co-ordination would be less direct. American troops in these operations were to be under British or French tactical control.[42]

[41] (1) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (2) Company E, U.S. 13th Armored Regiment, was attached to the 36th Brigade; the 1st Battalion, U.S. 1st Armored Regiment, was attached to Blade Force; and the Reconnaissance and Intelligence Platoon and 2d Battalion (less Company E) of the 13th Armored Regiment, the 175th Field Artillery Battalion, and Company C of the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion were attached to the 11th Infantry Brigade.

[42] CSTT Jnl, 24 Nov 42.

CHAPTER XVI

The Attack Toward Tunis

The Two Northern Columns Attack, 25 November

The 36th Infantry Brigade Group was not ready for the preliminary attack from Djebel Abiod scheduled for the night of 24–25 November and, when it started forward the following night, soon discovered that the enemy had withdrawn, thus frustrating elaborate plans to pin down and then overrun him. The troops continued a cautious but uncontested advance for two more days before coming to grips with the enemy just west of Djefna. At this rate the 36th Brigade Group could not expect, by drawing enemy forces westward to dispute its advance, to assist the Allied attack on Mateur from the south and southeast unless that attack had also fallen far behind schedule. Contact with the enemy was in fact to occur late on 28 November.

Blade Force's advance began on 25 November with more promising results. The column left its assembly area northeast of Bédja at 0700 with more than 100 tanks and many other vehicles. By 1300, it had reached the road junction south-southwest of Mateur on the Bédja-Sidi Nsir-Tebourba route. After driving out or capturing the German-Italian detachment in two farms near there, part of the force moved closer to Mateur while the remainder, which included the 1st Battalion, U.S. 1st Armored Regiment (Lt. Col. John K. Waters), continued farther east across the Tine river valley. During the latter part of 25 November and on the following day, this unit matched its strength with enemy ground and air forces in several engagements.

Colonel Waters' battalion had its Headquarters Company and three other companies of M3 light tanks, an 81-mm. mortar platoon, and an assault gun platoon employing three 75-mm. pack howitzers on half-tracks, but it had no artillery, infantry, or engineers attached, and it had to share the support of a handful of British aircraft with the rest of General Evelegh's whole command.

The American battalion had been ordered by Col. R. A. Hull, commanding Blade Force, to help create a "tank-infested area" in the Tine valley southeast of Mateur and to reconnoiter the bridges across the Medjerda river at El Bathan and Djedeïda, toward which the 11th Brigade Group would advance as soon at it had occupied Medjez el Bab. (*See Map VI.*) The route of reconnaissance led over the hills between the Tine river valley and the coastal plain via Chouïgui pass, a three-mile defile about thirty-five miles from Bédja with a good tarmac road and fairly steep grades. In the area of the western approach to Chouïgui pass Colonel Waters' battalion, around noon of 25 November, met a company of the *11th Parachute Engineer Battalion,* reinforced by an Italian antitank gun platoon, which had been sent from Mateur that same morning to augment the detachment at

Tebourba. The German force turned back in the face of the advancing American armored battalion and organized a defensive position in a walled French farm about two miles from the northwestern entrance to the pass. Company A (Maj. Carl Siglin), through lack of infantry, failed in its attempt to dislodge the occupants, and Company B (Maj. William R. Tuck) took up positions in the pass. During the day further British and American efforts to seize the farm also failed, until after the garrison withdrew to Mateur during the night.

Company C (Maj. Rudolph Barlow) toiled up the road on its reconnaissance mission. As it emerged on the Tebourba side of Chouïgui pass, Barlow's company overran an enemy outpost and destroyed its vehicles. The tanks then continued over the level plain in a rapid sortie toward El Bathan. Behind the company, enemy aircraft flew over the far side of the hills, where they bombed and strafed the rest of the battalion. Company C bypassed the German garrison in Tebourba and knocked out the enemy security detachment at the El Bathan bridge. Then, remaining on the northwest side of the Medjerda, it swung through the olive orchards which border the stream to observe the crossing at Djedeïda.

At this point one of the most bizarre incidents of World War II ensued. The enemy had neglected his own local security, so that the American force arrived at a low ridge sheltering the newly activated Djedeïda airfield without being detected. Parked beside the landing strip was a considerable number of Axis planes, perhaps those which had earlier attacked the main body of the tank battalion near Chouïgui pass. As soon as the situation was discovered, all seventeen tanks swept onto the airfield and precipitated the rarest of battles, that between armored vehicles and grounded aircraft. In the resulting melee, twenty or more enemy planes were destroyed, while the tanks shot up the buildings, supplies, and defending troops, and then withdrew in the dusk to the west. Losses were two men killed, one tank and its crew missing, and several other tanks damaged. Word of this exploit and a false report received at Nehring's headquarters a little later that evening that Allied tanks were within nine miles of Tunis caused acute anxiety to assail the German commander.

Actually, Major Barlow's company had completed its reconnaissance and returned to the battalion in bivouac near Chouïgui village. Before daylight, Colonel Waters' whole command had been brought back through Chouïgui pass to the Tine river valley to be in Blade Force reserve on 26 November. During the night, Nehring withdrew the Axis troops from Tebourba to Djedeïda, El Bathan, and St. Cyprien. He laid plans to consolidate more of his forces for a close-in defense of the Tunis bridgehead. Kesselring, on the other hand, correctly assured him that the Allied approach to Tunis would continue to be cautious and tentative, justifying the Axis command in adopting aggressive methods of defense.[1]

Early on 26 November, Colonel von Broich sent a small force consisting of a company of the *11th Parachute Engineer Battalion,* a company of the *3d Tunis Field Battalion,* and a company of the *190th Pan-*

[1] (1) 1st Bn 1st Armd Regt AAR, 31 Dec 42. (2) Rcd of intervs with Col Waters, 29 Dec 42. Copy in OPD 381 Africa, Sec 2, Case 71. (3) Interv with Col Rudolph Barlow. (4) MS # T–3–P1, Pt. II (Kesselring). (5) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42,* 25 Nov 42. (6) *Div. Broich, KTB, Nr. 1, 11.XI.–31.XII.42,* 25 Nov 42.



GERMAN MARK IV MEDIUM TANK *mounting a 75-mm. high-velocity gun.*

zer Battalion from Mateur toward Tebourba. The German force drew near Chouïgui pass after Colonel Waters' battalion had taken up its positions there for the day. Company C barred the southeastern entrance while the other three companies were on high ground, Company B parallel to the road approaching the northwestern entrance from the north and the others along the road from Sidi Nsir, extending as far west as St. Joseph's Farm near the Tine river. The enemy force, approaching from the north, included six Mark IV tanks with long 75-mm. high-velocity guns, a type not known to the Americans, and three or more Mark III's with 50-mm. rifles.

The impending action was the first battle between American and German armor in World War II. The Germans continued southward past Major Tuck's company, concealed in hull defilade on the reverse slope of a ridge, to meet the challenge of Major Siglin's company. The latter maneuvered to strike the enemy from the southwest, after a bold preliminary skirmish by the assault gun platoon. While Siglin's men claimed the enemy's attention, Tuck's 37-mm. guns, firing at close range from the east flank and rear, knocked out the six Mark IV's and one of the Mark III's before the enemy pulled back to the same walled farm he had occupied the previous day. The fight cost the Americans six M3's and several casualties, including the life of Major Siglin. Truck-borne infantry elements of the enemy force, arriving later near the walled farm, were driven off or destroyed, and eventually the strongpoint itself was abandoned. Two squadrons of 17/21 Lancers and some British artillery attempted to cut off the enemy's retreat and shared in smashing at least one more of his Mark III's. One company of the 1st British Parachute Battalion occupied

the vacated positions, which it thereafter labeled "Coxen's Farm." [2]

The Southern Attack Begins

The 11th Infantry Brigade, reinforced, which was to form the southern column of the three-pronged drive, meanwhile got off to an unpromising start and lagged behind schedule in its effort to take the town of Medjez el Bab. The defenders there consisted of the *3d Battalion, 5th Parachute Regiment* (three companies), an Italian antitank company, two 88-mm. dual-purpose guns, and tanks of the *190th Panzer Battalion*. The plan of attack required one reinforced infantry battalion to approach Medjez el Bab from each side of the river while a third element came from the west to seize commanding ground but not to enter the town until it had capitulated. The northern force (the 2d Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers Regiment), as it tried on the night of 24–25 November in bright moonlight to cross the bare and level plain toward Medjez el Bab, was caught by machine gun and mortar fire. The initial burst killed the commanding officer, and additional fire drove the entire force to cover. When artillery began at daylight, it pinned down the troops that had reached or crossed the river bed. During an attempt to withdraw that afternoon under cover of an artillery barrage, a tank-infantry counterattack from the town converted the retirement into a disorganized dispersal. Casualties were heavy.

The second force (the 5th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment with the U.S. 175th Field Artillery Battalion attached), attacking from the south-southwest, gained the heights of Djebel Bou Mouss (250), later known as "Grenadier Hill," by midmorning only to lose them soon afterward when the enemy counterattacked from Medjez el Bab with tanks. The attack on Medjez el Bab had already taken longer than expected and had failed on both wings.

The Germans, like the Allies six days earlier, withdrew from Medjez el Bab during the night of 25–26 November rather than commit more troops to its defense, a decision by Nehring which Kesselring later condemned. They had severely handled the Allied force, and, on the morning of 26 November, the Luftwaffe took hold where the ground troops had left off. During the day, Djedeïda airfield was reoccupied. Enemy planes gained air superiority and made movement over the open area near Medjez el Bab perilous. The dangers were not wholly from enemy aviation. Eleven P–38 American fighters drove off some Axis planes as the day's operations opened but then through error turned to subject an Allied column to five low-level strafing runs which, within three minutes, had severely damaged most of the guns and vehicles of Company C, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, and had killed five men and wounded sixteen. Antiaircraft fire had been withheld. By great ingenuity and extraordinary effort, all but two of the guns and most of the

[2] (1) Sitrep, *Div. Broich* to *XC Corps*, 26 Nov 42, in *Div. Broich, KTB, Nr. 1, 11.XI.–31.XII.42*, 26 Nov 42, and *Anlagenheft II, Anlage 8*. (2) 1st Bn 1st Armd Regt AAR, 31 Dec 42. (3) Capt Freeland A. Daubin, Jr., The Battle of "Happy Valley," MS. The Armored School, Fort Knox, Ky., 1948. (4) 1st Armd Div Hist and Jnl, Vol. I. (5) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42*, 26 Nov 42. (6) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. This is in certain respects contradictory concerning the relative roles of 17/21 Lancers and 1st Battalion, U.S. 1st Armored Regiment.

vehicles were restored to service during the next two days.[3]

At midday an Allied artillery barrage fell on Medjez el Bab. Tanks of the 2d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, then led a British infantry battalion in an assault. Resistance was negligible. The troops found the city almost abandoned and one span of its important bridge demolished. The enemy's withdrawal—along the coastal road, south of Mateur, from Chouïgui pass, and now down the Medjerda from Medjez el Bab—seemed to portend a general withdrawal to thicken his screen around Bizerte and Tunis.

Possession of Medjez el Bab was preliminary to a farther advance to Tebourba by the southern Allied column. Defenses were organized and during the night a Bailey bridge span was erected over the gap in the broken bridge. A force consisting of the 1st Battalion, East Surrey Regiment, and a small artillery group advanced northeastward to the edge of Tebourba by midnight 26–27 November. A few hours before daylight, 27 November, the village was in Allied possession. Headquarters, 11th Brigade Group, during the day transferred defense of Medjez el Bab and the river crossings southwest of it to French and American units, and sent forward to the Tebourba area the 5th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment, and the 2d Battalion, U.S. 13th Armored Regiment (less Company E).[4]

Tebourba, a town of less than 4,000 population, was a critical point in either attacking or defending Tunis. In approaching it from Medjez el Bab, Allied forces proceeded along the narrow shelf next to the Medjerda's northwestern bank and emerged through a widening gap between the hills and the river onto an open plain. A few miles to the east Tebourba's low white buildings nestled about a crossroads, surrounded by extensive, geometrically precise olive orchards. The river meandered in wide loops south of Tebourba and was crossed by a substantial bridge at El Bathan, a suburb somewhat more than a mile to the south. Equally distant to the east is the Djebel Maïana (186), a bare, steep ridge giving unexcelled observation over the area for several miles in all directions. It commands the road to Djedeïda, at the base of its northern slope, as well as the railroad to Tunis, on the narrow strip between the ridge and the river southeast of it. Two lower ridges lie about three miles farther east of Tebourba, between it and Djedeïda. From that village, where a stone-arched bridge spanned the Medjerda river, the plain, studded by a few low hills near the city, slopes very gently down to Tunis, some twelve miles distant. The river continues northeastward between Tunis and Bizerte to the sea. North and northwest of Tebourba the plain extends to the base of a mountain chain projecting between Tunis and Mateur. The road from Tebourba to Mateur ran through the small village of Chouïgui, four miles north of Tebourba, and thence via Chouïgui pass, over the low mountains between the coastal plan and the Tine river valley.

[3] (1) Redding, The Operations of C Company, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion . . ., MS. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga., 1948–49. (2) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42*, 26–28 Nov 42.

[4] CSTT Jnl, 27 Nov 42. The 1st Battalion, 4th Mixed Regiment of Zouaves and Tirailleurs, and one battery of the 3d Battalion, 62d Artillery Regiment, relieved British units at Medjez el Bab during the afternoon. Batteries of the U.S. 175th Field Artillery Battalion were emplaced at Medjez el Bab, Slourhia, and Testour.



DJEDEIDA, *looking northwest. Note remains of stone-arched bridge, center of photograph.*

This route was used by Blade Force after Colonel Hull had received orders from 78th Division on 27 November to assemble his armor in the Chouïgui area the next day. When the movement was reported to Nehring it confirmed his expectation that the Allied attack was to be concentrated on Tunis. The battles in which the two adversaries were soon engaged in and around Tebourba were to determine the success or failure of the first race for Tunis.

Axis forces had been withdrawn from Tebourba to the other side of the Medjerda. The 1st Battalion, East Surrey Regiment, reinforced, organized a perimeter defense of the town early on 27 November; late in the morning, one of its patrols toward Djedeïda was driven back. Shortly afterward two enemy columns of tanks and infantry assailed the northeastern and eastern sectors. One enemy tank succeeded in piercing the Allied screen about Tebourba, but it remained just a brief period. Around the outskirts, however, particularly in the cover of the olive groves, the battle persisted until dusk and became a series of sharp encounters as confused as combat can sometimes become. The enemy was pushed slowly eastward and at darkness broke off action and retired toward Djedeïda, taking along a few British prisoners and four damaged tanks, but leaving ten others behind. He had hurt the Allied force severely.[5]

[5] Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

The Battle for Djedeïda

The results of the fighting near Tebourba on 27 November left each adversary inclined to begin a new stage in his plan of operations. Nehring was ready for more steps in an aggressive defensive. On 28 November he used troops from both Mateur and Djedeïda to seize two of the ridges in the mass of low mountains north of Chouïgui pass. These two heights dominated a network of narrow tracks or dirt roads which connected the upper Tine valley with the coastal plain north of Djedeïda. Sicily-based squadrons began a swiftly rising rate of air support. He planned next day to extend Axis control to key road junctions on the route between Sidi Nsir and Chouïgui pass. Evelegh, on the other hand, had sent reinforced infantry units to those points during the night of 27–28 November, to assume the defense and release elements of Blade Force for the move of that command through Chouïgui pass to an assembly area between Chouïgui and Tebourba. On 28 November he regrouped for the next phase of his attack.

The original 78th Division plan to hold the Mateur–Tebourba base line before beginning the next stage of the offensive was now changed. The timetable had been upset both by the delay at Medjez el Bab and the failure to secure the bridges at El Bathan and Djedeïda. Efforts to prevent the flow of reinforcements through the ports and airfields of Bizerte and Tunis were not succeeding. The enemy seemed to have decided that time was on his side, and to await attack against his prepared positions. Conditions were ripe for concentrating strength to penetrate the Axis defensive perimeter, with the Allies using not only Blade Force but also the approaching elements and headquarters of Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division (Brig. Gen. Lunsford E. Oliver, Jr.) as soon as they came up from Souk el Arba. General Evelegh therefore planned to start the attack toward Mateur and that toward Tunis in close sequence.

The attack against Djedeïda would be made by the 11th Infantry Brigade Group. When bridge and town were in Allied possession, this force would turn to the northwest and advance on Mateur along the route of the main highway and the adjacent railroad between Djedeïda and Mateur. It would at the same time cover the nothern flank of the main attack on Tunis. Blade Force would use the captured bridge to strike eastward toward Tunis while Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, crossed the river at El Bathan, swung through St. Cyprien, and headed toward Tunis from the west-southwest.[6]

Two special operations were prepared which would assist these attacks: (1) the British 2d Parachute Battalion would drop, 29 November, from American transport aircraft to sabotage an airfield south of Tunis at Oudna and to protect the southern flank of the advance on Tunis, joining up eventually with the armored force near St. Cyprien; (2) the British 1st Commando (including some U.S. troops) was to make an amphibious landing west of Bizerte from which it would penetrate to the south and connect with the 36th Brigade Group on the coastal road.

In spite of Allied bombing of the ports and airfields at Bizerte and Tunis, Axis reinforcements kept arriving. General Nehring's forces now included four gigantic Mark VI ("Tiger") tanks with 88-mm. guns which had been sent to Tunisia for test in combat. Like the newest 88-mm.

[6] *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42*, 28 Nov 42.

antiaircraft batteries, they were supersecret weapons in which Hitler took a considerable interest. But more important, possibly, in actual defense of the bridgehead were the newly arrived staff and armored elements of the *10th Panzer Division,* commanded by General Fischer. Supplementing the *190th Panzer Battalion,* they were ready to take up the challenge of Blade Force before all of General Oliver's armored command arrived on the scene.[7]

The operations of 28 November did not go well for the Allies, and General Evelegh's plans were not realized. On the coastal road, the Allied advance guard, 12 carriers and 2 deployed companies of the 8th Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, were enticed into ambush in a defile between two hills. (*See Map XI.*) From the concealment of scrub-covered Djebel Azag (396, "Green Hill") and the bare and rocky slopes of Djebel Adjred (556, "Bald Hill"), west of Djefna, *Group Witzig* opened dense 20-mm. machine gun fire on the hapless leading elements. This blaze of fire destroyed 10 carriers, killed 30 men, led to the taking of 86 Allied prisoners, and drove the remaining Allied troops back with about 50 others wounded. An attempt by the enemy to envelop the Allied northern flank was effectively blocked, but a similar maneuver by the British was likewise successfully parried.[8]

If this secondary effort failed, the main attack from Tebourba against Djedeïda on 28 November fared no better. Djedeïda lay on the left bank of the Medjerda river some five miles northeast of Tebourba. The main road skirted the northern end of Djebel Maïana, as already noted, and continued over bare and generally flat country for three more miles to a pair of low ridges beyond which lay the airfield and the village. The main railroad line closely followed the northwest bank of the river. Carefully laid-out olive groves and a thin strip of woods along the tracks offered some cover there. The 11th Infantry Brigade Group was reinforced during the night and, after reconnaissance from Djebel Maïana, started an attack on Djedeïda airfield and village at 1300. With the support of medium tanks of the 2d Battalion of the U.S. 13th Armored Regiment (Lt. Col. Hyman Bruss), the 5th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment made the assault. From the neighboring ridge the airfield was shelled with considerable damage to newly arrived aircraft, but the attack against the village met heavy fire from concealed antitank guns and field artillery. The enemy positions were well protected by machine guns and infantry, and supported by dive bombers. General Nehring had made Djedeïda a special defense sector, and it was effectively organized and resolutely defended. After losing about five American tanks, the attacking force pulled back to re-

[7] (1) The following units of the *10th Panzer Division* had arrived and been unloaded by 29 November: two companies of the *1st Battalion, 7th Panzer Regiment,* with 32 Panzer III's and 2 Panzer IV's; two companies of the *10th Motorcycle Battalion;* and two companies of self-propelled antitank guns of the *90th Tank Destroyer Battalion.* (2) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42,* 29 Nov 42. (3) Minutes of conference between Hitler and Jodl, 1 Dec 42, part of the collection known as Minutes of Conferences between Hitler and Members of the German Armed Forces High Command, December 1942–March 1945 (hereafter cited as Minutes of Hitler Conference). OCMH Files.

[8] *Group Witzig* consisted of three companies of paratroops and five Italian self-propelled antitank guns, reinforced on 30 November by an infantry company.

(1) Sitrep, *Div. Broich* to *XC Corps,* 28 Nov 42, and AAR *Group Witzig* to *Div. Broich,* 28 Nov 42, in *Div. Broich, KTB, Nr. 1, 11.XI.–31.XII.42,* and *Anlagenheft II, Anlagen 8* and *9.* (2) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42,* 28 Nov 42.



GERMAN MARK VI TIGER TANK *mounting the 88-mm. gun (rear view of tank).*

organize. The infantry then pushed ahead under covering fire but stopped short of the village. British troops remained in possession of a ridge commanding Djedeïda, while the wounded were brought out during the night by the light of burning tanks, but it was clear that to gain the objective stronger Allied forces would be required next day. The capture of Mateur, moreover, could not well be undertaken until the river crossing at Djedeïda was controlled by the Allied troops.[9]

Allied artillery reinforcements came up during the night of 28–29 November, including the U.S. 5th Field Artillery Battalion, which had recently arrived in the area after leaving Oran on 20 November. Acting on orders to place his batteries northeast of Djedeïda that night, the battalion commander and several battery commanders went forward on reconnaissance. Under the misconception that the British held Djedeïda, they drove along the road from Tebourba and ran into an ambush which robbed the battalion of its principal officers before it had even gone into action. After reorganizing next morning, the battalion occupied positions east of Tebourba in support of the 11th Infantry Brigade.[10]

The French aided the build-up near Tebourba by assuming, along with elements of the U.S. 175th Field Artillery Battalion, protection of the Bordj Toum bridge across the Medjerda northeast of Medjez el Bab, and by increasing the French forces at Medjez el Bab, thus relieving the bulk of the 11th Infantry Brigade Group for the battle. On the night of 28 November, the 1st Bat-

[9] (1) Interv with Maj Philip St. G. Cocke, 13 Jan 50. (2) Rcd of interv with Col. Bruss, 29 Dec 42. OPD 381 Africa, Sec 2, Case 71. (3) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[10] 5th FA Bn AAR, 13 Nov 42–18 Jan 43, 6 Mar 43.

talion, East Surrey Regiment, organized a bridgehead on the southeast side of the river at El Bathan.[11]

The Allied drive toward Tunis reached its climax on 29 November. The 11th Infantry Brigade Group renewed its assault on Djedeïda after a half-hour's artillery preparation of high explosive and smoke shells at dawn, followed by an attack of the 5th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment, and a dozen American tanks of the 2d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment. The enemy leaped to his guns when the barrage lightened and hit the tanks with antitank and heavy machine gun fire as they came over a ridge and rolled down the forward slope. Enemy airplanes were extremely effective. Tanks which pulled back to defilade found no cover from repeated dive-bombing in the open, rolling countryside. Enemy air attacks, more intense than those of any previous day, also harried the infantry as it broke off the assault. These attacks continued as one portion of the infantry organized a defensive line at the ridge while the remainder withdrew to Tebourba. Although the 2d Battalion, Hampshire Regiment, came up after dark to relieve the 5th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment, General Evelegh was permitted to suspend the attack before daylight, 30 November, pending a marked improvement in Allied air strength.

The approaching reinforcements (the 1st British Guards Brigade and Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, and the British 6th Armoured Division west of them) would be helpful, but the most compelling necessity was to end enemy command of the air over the battlefield, such as he had enjoyed for the past two days. The Eastern Air Command could do little to remedy the situation. Its medium and heavy bombers kept hitting the airdromes and seaports through which the enemy was receiving his reinforcements, while strikes on the airfields inflicted some damage on the enemy's air power, but it could not keep enough Allied fighter squadrons in the air, or base them near enough to the area of ground combat. To put an airfield at Medjez el Bab into operation by 2 December offered the only serious hope of bettering Allied air support of the Eastern Task Force.[12]

The northern attack along the coastal highway by the 36th Brigade Group spent its force on 29–30 November in one last courageous effort. Observers could not spot the many camouflaged enemy machine gun positions on Green Hill north of the road even with the aid of low-level air reconnaissance. A night attack on that hill by the British 6th Commando (−) and on Bald Hill by the 6th Battalion, Royal West Kent Regiment (−), put men on the upper slopes, only to have them pinned down in daylight. By nightfall, 30 November, the whole undertaking of the north column was stopped. The 36th Brigade Group withdrew toward Sedjenane, leaving *Group Witzig* in control.[13] Southeast of Mateur continuing

[11] (1) On 30 November the following were located in the Medjez el Bab area: staff and two battalions of the 4th Mixed Zouaves and Tirailleurs Regiment; the 3d Battalion, 62d Artillery Regiment; a section of motorized engineers; a motorized group of the 2d Battalion, 7th Guards Regiment; two 47-mm. guns of the 62d Artillery Regiment; and five American antiaircraft guns. At Bordj Toum the company was from the 3d Battalion, 43d Colonial Infantry Regiment. See Station List in CSTT Jnl, 30 Nov 42. (2) 175th FA Bn War Diary, 28–29 Nov 42.

[12] Info supplied by Air Ministry, London.

[13] German casualties were fourteen killed, twenty wounded, and one missing. ARR, *Group Witzig* to *Div. Broich*, 30 Nov and 1 Dec 42, in *Div. Broich, KTB, Nr. 1, 11.XI.–31.XII.42, Anlagenheft II, Anlage* 9, 29, 30 Nov, 1 Dec 42.

the advance from heights north of Chouïgui pass, which had been occupied on 28 November, the reinforced battalion of *Regiment Barenthin* on Nehring's orders occupied the ridge east of Coxen's Farm on 29 November and consolidated its hold on the high ground east of the Tine river.[14] Mateur thus remained well guarded, both from the west and southeast.

The amphibious landing operation of the 1st Commando on the coast west of Bizerte, which was to assist the advance of the 36th Brigade Group, was executed. Starting from Tabarka at 1800 on 30 November, British and American troops were put ashore during the early hours of 1 December without opposition. They advanced to their designated objectives on the Bizerte—Mateur road, denying its use to the enemy for three days. Running low on supplies, unable to establish radio communications with the brigade headquarters, and harassed by the Germans, they were finally forced to withdraw to Sedjenane where the last elements arrived on 5 December. In this raid the 1st Commando suffered 134 casualties, including 74 American.[15]

General Evelegh's recommendation on 29 November to postpone the attack was not approved in time to prevent the parachute operation on the southeast flank. At 1450, 29 November, about 500 men of the 2d Parachute Battalion (Br.) floated to earth near Depienne, about twenty-five miles south of Tunis. They proceeded that night to Oudna airfield but found that it was not in Axis use. Flight upon flight of Stukas and fighters over the troops in Tunisia came from other fields. Paratroopers cut the telephone lines and demolished other installations at the empty airfield, and then hid in the hills until the following night. When they learned by radio that the attack on Tunis had been postponed, they made their way back to Medjez el Bab as best they could, harried by the enemy, hampered by the wounded, and widely scattered during successive night marches. Losses were 19 killed, 4 wounded, and 266 missing.[16]

Axis parachutists were a threat to the highly vulnerable line of communications in the rear of the Eastern Task Force. To protect this line French guards were therefore mounted at bridges, culverts, and tunnels, in response to orders issued on 30 November.[17]

Suspension of the Allied attack on Djedeïda early on 30 November and at the enemy's Djefna position at the end of the day was intended to be temporary. The Allied commander in chief, whose command post at Gibraltar had been moved to Algiers on 25 November, returned from a tour of the front on 30 November and in a review of the situation, stated his intentions as follows:

> My immediate aim is to keep pushing hard, with a first intention of pinning the enemy back in the Fortress of Bizerte and confining him so closely that the danger of a breakout or a heavy counteroffensive will be minimized. Then I expect to put everything we have in the way of air and artillery on him and to pound him so hard that the way for a final and decisive blow can be adequately prepared. While that preparation is going on, we can clean up the territory to the south. In this plan, our greatest concern is to keep the air going efficiently on inadequate, isolated fields.[18]

[14] (1) Sitrep, *Div. Broich* to *XC Corps*, 29, 30 Nov 42, in *Div. Broich, KTB, Nr. 1, 11.XI.–31.XII.42, Anlagenheft II, Anlage 8.* (2) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42*, 28, 29 Nov 42.

[15] Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] CSTT Jnl, 30 Nov 42.

[18] Ltr, Eisenhower to Marshall, 30 Nov 42. Copy in OPD 381 Africa, Sec 1, Tab 50.

Axis forces were affected during these critical days by a strong sense of crisis. Allied bombing of the airfields at El Aouina and Sidi Ahmed, aimed at interrupting the flow of enemy reinforcements, was so destructive that continual improvisation and strenuous labor were required to keep these fields in operation. Troops normally engaged in other duties were diverted to repairs and fire control. As a temporary expedient, incoming plane loads of Axis troops were held over for twenty-four hours for such work before being shifted to forward areas. The decisive shipment of tanks and guns which arrived on 27 November was unloaded on 28–29 November and speeded to forward assembly areas and thence to combat. Allied armor posed the most serious threat, for air reconnaissance on 29 November reported approximately 135 Allied tanks between Djedeïda airfield and Sidi Nsir. General Nehring was obliged to choose between using the few new-type 88-mm. dual-purpose guns at his disposal to defend the airfields from Allied bombers or to protect the road to Tunis against Allied tanks. He chose the latter alternative. But even while the Allied advance was being stopped, primarily by enemy air supremacy, the Axis was preparing for an aggressive defense. General Evelegh's decision to pause was almost simultaneous with a decision by General Nehring to strike back at Tebourba.[19]

[19] (1) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42,* 28–30 Nov 42. (2) MS # D–147 (Nehring).

CHAPTER XVII

Stalemate Before Tunis

Field Marshal Kesselring directed General Nehring, commanding the German forces defending Tunis, to enlarge the area they were holding. During a visit to Tunis on 28 November he found much to criticize. He believed that Medjez el Bab should have been defended rather than abandoned. The unloadings of cargo at Bizerte had been much too slow, limiting operations against the Allies and retarding the schedule of sea transport. He found Nehring's attitude too cautious and defensive. Since another infantry regiment was soon to arrive, he urged that the situation be faced with confident determination rather than in a mood of desperation. Finally, he ordered Nehring to regain lost ground up to a line running from Tebourba gap to Massicault. Nehring placed the operation under command of the recently arrived commanding general of the *10th Panzer Division,* General Wolfgang Fischer, and scheduled it for not later than 1 December.[1]

The Allied forces were then widely dispersed in the Tebourba area. The most advanced elements were at the ridge line near Djedeida. (Map VI) Two miles west of them a company held Djebel Maïana (186) and made full use of its dominating position for observation of the plain below. Close to Tebourba village were various units, including the 2d Battalion, U.S. 13th Armored Regiment, and the U.S. 5th Field Artillery Battalion. Other units were at El Bathan, on the southeastern bank of the Medjerda river south of Tebourba. The remainder of the Allied troops held a triangular area whose points, about four miles apart, were at Tebourba village (5th Northamptons), Chouïgui village (Blade Force less 17/21 Lancers), and Tebourba gap (Headquarters, 11th Brigade, 17/21 Lancers, and artillery and antitank units).

Tebourba gap is a narrow belt of level ground between Djebel Lanserine (569) and the Medjerda river through which a highway and railroad run to Medjez el Bab. Along the western edge of the triangle are the serried shoulders of Djebel Lanserine, rising from the edge of the rolling plain. Between Tebourba gap and Tebourba is a low ridge, while between Tebourba and Chouïgui are dips and wadies and a few clumps of trees. Since 29 November Blade Force had been assembled in the area of Chouïgui and in a position to protect the left (northern) flank of Brig. E. E. Cass's 11th Infantry Brigade, at the same barring time access to Chouïgui pass from the east

[1] (1) *XC Army Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42,* 28 Nov 42. (2) MS # D–147 (Nehring). (3) MS # T–3–P2 (Kesselring). (4) Rpt, *10. Panzer Division, Ic, Gefechtsbericht ueber Gefecht Tebourba vom 1.–4.XII.42,* 3 Jan 43, in *10. Panzer Division, Abt. Ic, Anlagen zum Taetigheitsbericht* (hereafter referred to as *10th Panzer Div, Ic, TB Anlagen), 29.XI.42–15.III.43, Anlage 49.* (5) General Fischer was relieved as Military Governor of Bizerte by Generalmajor Georg Neuffer, commanding general of the *20th Flak Division.*

From this assembly area the 17/21 Lancers (17/21L) had moved early in the morning of 1 December to Tebourba gap, leaving the 1st Battalion, U.S. 1st Armored Regiment, and other elements of Blade Force behind. This was the setting for General Fischer's counterattack, which opened a little later that morning.[2]

The Axis Counterattack Begins

To carry out his orders Fischer was assigned the forces in the *Tunis North* sector, *190th Panzer Battalion,* and those elements of the *10th Panzer Division* that had arrived in Tunisia. The *Tunis North* sector forces manned a perimeter, divided into two subsectors—that under Colonel Guensch running from Protville to Djedeïda and that under Lt. Col. Koch from Djedeïda through St. Cyprien to La Mohammedia. *Group Lueder* (elements of *190th Panzer Battalion*), which had helped close the gap between Mateur and Djedeïda on 28 November by its advance from Sidi Athman, stood three miles north of Chouïgui pass, and the elements of the *10th Panzer Division* under Captain Hudel were assembling in the area around Protville. From the Mateur area Fischer recalled on 30 November a small tank unit which had been with *Group Witzig* opposing Brig. A. L. Kent-Lemon's 36th Brigade Group. General Fischer expected to have at his disposal for his attack approximately forty tanks, mostly Mark III's, and about fifteen 75-mm. antitank guns and he was expecting additional reinforcements daily.[3] Late on 30 November he took command of the *Tunis North* sector from Colonel Stolz and issued orders for his counterattack from headquarters at Le Bardo, on the edge of Tunis. The only radio available to his staff was that in Tunis at *Headquarters, XC Corps.* Some of the forces to be committed would pass out of radio contact at the first hostilities and could be reached thereafter only by courier. Accepting this handicap, he assigned and scheduled objectives that would take a considerable period of time, and prepared to exercise direct command at various points on the battlefield, trusting otherwise to the discretion of his principal subordinate commanders.

The operation was to open with a holding attack on the southern flank and an armored thrust against the northern flank delivered at the triangle south of Chouïgui village. Four separate groups were organized. At the outset, three would be in motion while the fourth waited in reserve. At the south, *Group Koch* (seven companies of parachute infantry, three companies of regular infantry, one German and one Italian antitank company, two field artillery pieces, and platoons of engineers and bicyclists) was to tie down the Allies by attacking El Bathan. Northwest of Chouïgui village, *Group Lueder* (one company of tanks, one field artillery battery of three guns, one company of dismounted motorcycle troops) was to exit from a valley near Hill 258 and attack toward the south, while also blocking the road through Chouïgui pass. *Group Hudel* (two companies of tanks, two companies of antitank guns, and a company of dismounted motorcycle troops) was to attack from Sidi Athman, eight miles north of Djedeïda, and destroy the Allied armored force at Chouïgui, and then, in conjunction with *Group Lueder,* to drive through

[2] Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[3] (1) *XC Corps, KTB I, 16.–30.XI.42,* 29 Nov 42. (2) *10th Panzer Div, Ic, TB Anlagen, 29.XI.42–15.III.43, Anlage 49.* (3) Rpt, *10th Panzer Div, Waffenmeldung,* 3 Dec 42, in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB Anlagen, Id Akten zum KTB I–V, 29.XI.42–4.III.43.*



THE GERMAN 88-MM. FLAK GUNS

Chouïgui and attack Tebourba from the west. If the Allies were already falling back from the town by the time the armored groups reached the area west of Tebourba, the mission of *Groups Lueder* and *Hudel* would be to block the Tebourba gap.

Ready at Djedeïda, a fourth group (*Group Djedeida*) would pursue the Allies if they pulled back during the tank operations north of Tebourba but otherwise would await General Fischer's specific order to attack. *Group Djedeida* included one company of parachute infantry, two companies of regular infantry, two antiaircraft companies, eighteen 20-mm. guns, a motorcycle engineer platoon, elements of a tank destroyer company (three 55-mm. guns), two Mark III tanks and the two untried Tiger tanks which had successfully made the overland trip from port to battle front. Several of the new 88-mm. flak guns were diverted from the defense of Bizerte to be

converted to use as antitank weapons of surprising power.[4]

The German counterattack began at 0745, 1 December. It had substantial success from the start. Allied troops saw the two armored columns converging on Chouïgui, elements of Blade Force in the vicinity first observing *Group Lueder.* Northwest of the village, they engaged in a relatively brief artillery exchange which cost each side light losses. The attacking group in two extended V-shaped lines continued south toward Chouïgui. The supply and service units of Blade Force, screened by 1st Battalion, U.S. 1st Armored Regiment, and Squadron B, 1st Derbyshire Yeomanry, fell back east toward Tebourba to avoid being enveloped. Then *Group Hudel,* accompanied by General Fischer, delivered the main blow against Chouïgui from the north. Blade Force was thus attacked from two directions, and before noon had been largely overrun, its headquarters dispersed, and the remainder driven back on Tebourba. An attempt to assist the armor at Chouïgui by sending 17/21 Lancers back from Tebourba gap to Blade Force's western flank proved ineffectual. When the Lancers moved out of the cover of an olive grove and approached their objective across open ground, five of their Crusader tanks were knocked out by the enemy's longer-ranged guns, concealed in the trees south of Chouïgui. The remainder pulled back to a strong position on a knoll northwest of Tebourba in support of the 11th Brigade Group. When the units of Blade Force which had not been destroyed at Chouïgui later withdrew to Tebourba, they were attached to 17/21 Lancers for further employment.

The German armor continued southward from Chouïgui in a careful pursuit which was slowed even further by the delaying action of a British armored car unit, covering the somewhat hasty withdrawal into Tebourba gap of Allied trains, artillery, and other units. The congestion of vehicles converging there was increased when enemy rifle and machine gun fire from Hill 104 near the southern bank of the river temporarily stopped movement along the northern bank. Allied artillery emplaced on high ground at Tebourba gap was weakly protected against possible ground attack with close air support, but the afternoon passed without execution of such a threat although enemy air attacks were frequent. At the same time, these batteries continued successfully to slow the southward advance of the Germans despite persistent counterbattery and heavy machine gun fire on their positions. *Groups Lueder* and *Hudel* were finally stopped just north of the main road betwen Tebourba gap and Tebourba, although they succeeded in denying use of that road to the Allies despite one Allied air bombing and persistent Allied artillery fire. During the afternoon, the defenders did not fall back westward from Tebourba but, reinforced by the arrival of elements of Blade Force, held their positions. Under Fischer's plan, German armor was expected to attack Tebourba next, but instead it was held northwest of the village while *Group Djedeïda* attacked.

Group Djedeïda attacked early in the afternoon against the Allied line at the ridge west of Djedeïda, marking the climax of Allied progress toward Tunis. General Fischer had left *Group Hudel,* around noon after Chouïgui had fallen, to lead *Group Djedeïda*'s attack personally. Its troops were inferior in skill and morale, and it lacked

[4] *10th Panzer Div, Ic, TB Anlagen, 29.XI.42–15.III.43, Anlage 49.*

reserves. The two supporting Tiger tanks were helpful, but the stubborn resistance offered by the 2d Hampshires (2/H) held the attackers far short of their objective.

During the course of the day the elements of *Group Koch* designated for the attack on the German left (south) flank advanced to points south and east of El Bathan.

The Allied situation at nightfall, 1 December, was not good, although the battle had not reached a decisive stage. Enemy maneuvers had exposed the 11th Brigade Group's northern flank and had reduced the zone between Tebourba and Tebourba gap to a narrowing strip close to the Medjerda. Enemy air attacks upon Allied units moving in daylight had increased in tempo. Blade Force was divided. Its effectiveness as a tactical unit had been destroyed. The 11th Brigade Group was strung out from Tebourba gap on the west to the vicinity of Djedeïda on the east and was grouped in four principal sections: (1) the 2d Battalion, Hampshire Regiment, at the ridge near Djedeïda, with one company of the 1st Battalion, East Surrey Regiment (1/ES), on Djebel Maïana west of it, protecting the observation post, and miscellaneous units, including elements of the 2d Battalion, U.S. 13th Armored Regiment, near Tebourba; (2) a southern force, the 1st Surreys (−), holding El Bathan on the southern side of the river with two companies supported by heavy artillery and antitank guns; (3) a western force, chiefly artillery, on the hills north of Tebourba gap; and (4) the remnants of Blade Force, mainly the 17/21 Lancers, harboring south of Tebourba village.

These Allied troops improved their situation during the night by shifts and reinforcements. Most of the 5th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment (5/NH), after blunting the German armored thrust, was able to move onto the ridges north of Tebourba gap to protect the hitherto exposed artillery positions there, while remnants of Blade Force continued to rally in that area. Substantial reinforcements from Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, approached from Medjez el Bab and brought to Tebourba gap by daylight of 2 December the light tanks of the 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment (less Company C), the mediums of Company E, 13th Armored Regiment, which had been recalled from attachment to the 36th Brigade Group, the 1st and 2d Battalions, 6th Armored Infantry, and a battery of four self-propelled 105-mm. howitzers of the 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. A truck convoy loaded with ammunition, gasoline, and rations got through to Tebourba where replenishment was badly needed. Partially offsetting these gains, the southern force defending El Bathan lost the support of the U.S. 5th Field Artillery Battalion's 155-mm. howitzers by its failure to receive ammunition resupply. Without authorization by the commander of the British artillery unit to which it was attached, the battalion withdrew during the night rather than uselessly expose its weapons.[5]

The Second Day

General Evelegh had forfeited the initiative but intended, if possible, to relieve Blade Force with Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, under command of General Oliver, and to counterattack the

[5] (1) 5th FA Bn AAR, 13 Nov 42–18 Jan 43. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (3) CCB 1st Armd Div Opns Jnl, 8 Nov 42–11 May 43. (4) *10th Panzer Div, Ic, TB Anlagen, 29.XI.42–15.III.43, Anlage 49.*

enemy's armored forces northwest of Tebourba while the 11th Brigade Group held its positions. The enemy for his part intended to draw tighter the German ring encircling Tebourba by sending the two armored groups and *Group Djedeïda* against it in the morning while *Group Koch* prevented any withdrawal to the south through El Bathan and also reconnoitered against the possibility of Allied reinforcements approaching from the southwest. During the night, General Fischer sent an armored detachment to gain control of Tebourba gap, through which Allied reinforcements were correctly reported to be moving northeastward, but his force was driven away toward Chouïgui.

The enemy's prospects of early success were dimmed by the low quality of his infantry units. The *Tunis Replacement Battalions,* casual infantry which had been brought to *XC Corps,* were seriously deficient in important respects. General Fischer reported to General Nehring of their 1 December's action:

> . . . not the slightest interest existed, no aggressive spirit, no readiness for action, so that I was forced to lead some companies, platoons, even squads, and to assign them a sector on the battlefield. I consider it my duty to point out this critical condition as it is impossible to fight successfully with such troops. It is also true that their command is inadquate. I have warned one captain who failed several times to execute his missions that in case of a repetition I would have him relieved. I had another officer relieved on the spot and demanded that he be court-martialed because he and his men lurked under cover for hours. . . .[6]

[6] Rpt, *10th Panzer Div* to *XC Corps,* 2 Dec 42, in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB Anlagen, Ia, Geh. und Geh. Kdo. Sachen (Afrika, Tunis) Band 1, 16.XI.-42–12.I.43* (hereafter cited as *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB, Anlagen, Geh. und Geh. Kdo. Sachen, Band 1, 16.XI.42–12.I.43*).

The enemy nevertheless expanded his first day's gains during 2 December. He did not occupy much new ground but he further weakened the Allies. The 2d Battalion, Hampshire Regiment, by bitter fighting at the easternmost ridge line, held *Group Djedeïda,* except for a penetration along the Medjerda river, but at heavy cost. At midnight the depleted British force had to withdraw about two miles to a new line which ran south from Djebel Maïana to the river, the left (northern) flank being protected by A Company, 1st Surreys. The southern defending force, two companies of the 1st Surreys in El Bathan, for a time supported by a detachment of 17/21 Lancers in forays against enemy mortar and machine gun emplacements, was worn down by persistent attack from *Group Koch.* It was threatened with partial encirclement after enemy machine gunners had infiltrated across the river into the olive groves on the Tebourba side. Because of the need to reinforce the troops at Tebourba village, Brigadier Cass authorized withdrawal of the infantry to positions nearer Tebourba, leaving the bridge at El Bathan covered only by antitank guns in exposed forward positions.

On the plain northwest of Tebourba, enemy armor almost completed its attempt to encircle the village. Brigadier Cass had four separate elements with which to oppose the German tanks. One consisted of tanks from the 1st Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, which had formed a part of Blade Force. They had been driven back to the cover to Tebourba's olive orchards on the previous afternoon, and had later slipped northward from Tebourba to a wadi nearer Chouïgui to escape being trapped. In the early morning, after scooting westward to the base of the hills and then continuing southward toward Tebourba gap, most of

them reached the cover of British artillery and there rejoined the main Allied force. Another element available was the 2d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment (less Company E), which had been defending Tebourba village from close-in positions. It was in danger of being cut off at Tebourba and out of communication with Colonel Bruss, its commander. The newly arrived elements of Combat Command B formed a third armored element. The British antitank units attached to the 11th Brigade Group formed the fourth and vital part of the total Allied strength.

The situation on the morning of 2 December called for a well co-ordinated employment of these troops in tactics adapted to certain advantages held by each side. The Germans had pronounced air superiority. Their tanks were individually stronger than the American tanks, and some of their antitank guns were greatly superior to anything the Allies possessed. The Allies had larger numbers of tanks and antitank guns, and could also count on well-placed field artillery, aided by superb observation. The enemy's well-knit armored groups were obliged to operate in a limited zone between Tebourba and Tebourba gap, where they were necessarily exposed much of the time to fire from the flanks and, if they turned against either area, to fire and counterattack from the rear. Instead of taking advantage of this situation, the Allies frittered away some of their armored strength in an attempt to pit tanks against tanks without even seeking to benefit from greater numbers. Brigadier Cass was unable, moreover, to make effective use of all Allied strength for lack of radio communications with important elements of his command. General Oliver, as commander of Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, was expected to assume command of all armored units upon the relief of Blade Force, and at 1150, 2 December, he sent forward from Medjez el Bab Brig. Gen. Paul M. Robinett, commander of the 13th Armored Regiment, to bring about co-ordination from an advanced command post nearer Tebourba. Robinett's party arrived after a sortie of over thirty light tanks—made by 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, against German Mark IV's without benefit of artillery support—had been driven back with heavy losses, and as Colonel Bruss was sending medium tanks of Company E, 13th Armored Regiment, toward Tebourba with a view to reinforcing and extricating the remainder of the 2d Battalion of that regiment, west of the village. This ill-conceived attempt subjected the American vehicles to antitank fire which destroyed eight of the Shermans, cost several lives, and despite heroic conduct brought no benefits to the Allied side.[7] Cass and Robinett agreed that the situation required defensive tactics until British and American forces could be strengthened and co-ordinated. Another attack by 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, was canceled.

Neither *Group Lueder* nor *Group Hudel* could punch its way as far as the river to cut off completely the Allies in and near Tebourba. The Allied artillery in the olive

[7] (1) 1st Armd Regt AAR, 8 Nov 42–13 May 43; CCB 1st Armd Div Opns Jnl, 8 Nov 42–11 May 43. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (3) Interv with Gen Robinett. (4) Robinett correspondence with participants in the battle, 1949–50, in his possession. (5) Rcd of interv with Col Bruss, 29 Dec 42. OPD 381 Africa, Sec 2, Case 71. (6) Redding, The Operations of C Company, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, 24 November–11 December 1942, MS. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga., 1948–49. (7) Scenes of the battle form part of a Signal Corps color film (Misc 1001), "At the Front, North Africa."

groves west of the town joined the guns on high ground above the gap, catching the armored units from two directions, holding them back and inflicting substantial losses. Although the Germans dominated the main road between the gap and the village, they still left available to the Allies an unimproved track running close to the river's bank and screened by trees.

The fighting of 2 December thus left the Germans still holding the initiative, still bringing up reinforcements, with much more yet to accomplish before the battle could be said to be theirs. The successive defeats of both British and American armor were ominous for the Allies, for they suggested that, even if the battle for Tebourba ended with a German withdrawal, Allied offensive power would be below requirements for a successful final assault on Tunis. At the same time, Axis air activity showed no sign of abatement. Under these conditions the next day's battle, even if won by the Allies, might determine merely how far they could get in their December drive toward Tunis with no likelihood of leading to ultimate victory.

The Climax of the Counterattack, 3 December

On 2 December, two companies of the *10th Panzer Division*'s *86th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* were flown from Italy to Tunisia and thence to reinforce *Group Djedeïda* in the next day's assault. The main effort was to be made by this group along the railroad, immediately after a heavy dive-bombing attack and with the support of tanks. Hill 186 was its objective. *Group Lueder* was ordered to stop traffic moving westward from Tebourba by pushing all the way to the river. *Group Hudel,* while supporting *Group Lueder*'s operation, was required to bar withdrawal from Tebourba to the northwest and north. *Group Koch,* besides strengthening the close-in protection of Tunis against a possible attack from the southwest, was to bar retreat over the El Bathan bridge and to harass Allied traffic through the Tebourba gap by fire from hills opposite it on the southeastern bank of the river.

The third day's fighting brought favorable results to the Axis forces. Quickly the two German armored groups, by taking two hills west of the town, narrowed the opening along the river's northerly side through which the Allies to the west might keep in communication with those in Tebourba. Although El Bathan was mistakenly left undefended by *Group Koch* for part of the morning, leaving open a way for possible Allied withdrawal from Tebourba, the Allies had pulled back from El Bathan and were much too engrossed in resisting the seizure of Hill 186 (Djebel Maïana) to grasp the opportunity.[8]

Group Djedeïda waited until 1000 for a scheduled preparatory dive-bombing attack and then attacked without it. In a two-pronged thrust the Germans struck for Djebel Maïana. The right group gained the northern end of the ridge, secured it, then pressed southward until they controlled the entire hill. The loss of Hill 186 with its superlative observation post in the end proved decisive. Valiant counterattacks launched during the afternoon by the 2d Hampshires were tantalizingly half-successful. The German left (south) prong of the Djedeïda

[8] (1) *10th Panzer Div, Ic, TB Anlagen, 29.XI.42–15.III.43, Anlage 49.* (2) Rpt *10th Panzer Div* to *XC Corps,* 3 Dec 42, in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB, Anlagen, Geh. und Geh. Kdo. Sachen, Band 1, 16.XI.42–12.I.43.*



EL BATHAN. *Portion of Hill 186 can be seen on right beyond the loop in the Medjerda river. Cluster of white buildings, left background, is Tebourba.*

group, reinforced by tanks and supported by air strikes, broke through the British line just north of the river and by 1630 had succeeded in temporarily isolating the 2d Hampshires in the orchards east of Tebourba. After a last attempt by the 1st Surreys to regain Hill 186 had failed, and under a very heavy dive-bombing attack on Tebourba, the remnants of the 2d Hampshires prepared at 1800, together with remnants of other units, to evacuate Tebourba village.

The route of the withdrawal, begun after dark, was southward to the track along the river bank and thence westward through Tebourba gap. The enemy subjected the area to heavy artillery and machine gun fire. As the column of vehicles thickened, some near its head were hit and set on fire; movement stopped, bombardment was intensified, part of the track close to the river gave way; progress became impossible, and extrication of the vehicles all but impossible. They were therefore abandoned—field guns, tractors, and motor transport, along with much ammunition. The troops infiltrated across the countryside in small groups to Tebourba gap. The enemy had fortunately been cleared from the hills south of the river by Company C, U.S. 6th Armored Infantry, supported by Battery A, 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, in a sharp, short action on the previous morning. The way from Tebourba gap up the Medjerda valley was thus cleared of harassing fire at this critical time.

At 1100, 4 December, attacks from both east and west broke swiftly into Tebourba and, about an hour later, yielded the town

to *Groups Lueder* and *Djedeïda. Group Koch* then advanced northward from El Bathan and established contact with the other Axis units. The Allies had been stopped and turned back. They had withdrawn what they could, but the losses inflicted upon them by General Fischer's command in four days were estimated by him to total: 55 tanks, 4 armored cars, 4 antitank guns, 6 100-mm. guns and 6 120-mm. guns, 13 smaller guns, 38 machine guns, 40 mortars, 300 motor vehicles, 1,000 to 1,100 Allied prisoners, and quantities of ammunition of many kinds. It was an unmistakable victory for Fischer and Nehring.[9]

The general situation in Tunisia was reported to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 3 December by General Eisenhower as follows:

1. We have gone beyond the sustainable limit of air capabilities in supporting ground forces in a pell-mell race for Tunisia. Consequently, although our air forces have been working at maximum pace without even minimum repair, supply and maintenance facilities, the scale of possible support is insufficient to keep down the hostile strafing and dive-bombing which is so largely responsible for breaking up all attempted advances by ground forces.

2. The Air Commanders report that from 2 days to 1 week more of present scale air operation, under existing conditions, will leave them near or at complete breakdown, yet this scale of air support is not sufficient. To provide reasonable conditions for air operations we must arrange at once for:

(a) Advanced operating airfields.
(b) Air maintenance troops well forward.
(c) Stocks of spare parts and supplies in advanced dromes.
(d) Warning services and Ack Ack.

To do these things we need a breathing space and proper air cover over land and sea routes of communication in the rear areas.

3. We will curtail air operations in forward areas to bomber attacks on ports and hostile lines of communication with occasional fighter attacks against existing airfields. Our ground operations will be reduced to consolidating principal gains. . . . All our ground forces in Tunisia, except a portion of the "Blade" force brought out for refitting, are in contact. No reserves are present in that area.

4. Seven days or even more of delay would not be particularly serious in view of tremendous distances we have advanced ahead of schedule, provided we could stop Axis ground reinforcement, something that to date we have not been able to do. Even with some opportunity to improve our general supply situation east of Algiers, there is a definite limit to our rate of build up and the strength of forces we can sustain in Tunisia. . . .

5. . . . We hope, by reducing the number of aircraft in the forward areas during the next 5 days, to cut down plane losses . . . and build up reserve supplies . . . for a sustained effort of several days. During the same period we will have an opportunity to straighten out the congested condition on our railway line between Constantine and the forward areas and get supplies moving to the proper places. Because of the shortage of motor transport, sidings have become crowded and supplies immobilized. To move supplies will require not only the use of whatever troops and trucks the French may be able to give us . . . but the use of our own tactical vehicles.

6. Should these calculations and anticipations work out, we will resume the advance as soon as possible. The present target date is December 9th. The principal objective will be the capture of Tunis, to throw the enemy

[9] (1) *10 Panzer Div, Ic, TB Anlagen, 29.XI.42–15.III.43, Anlage 49.* (2) Ltr, Gen Robinett to Gen Marshall, 8 Dec 42. Copy in OPD Exec 8, Item 7, Tab 30. This letter describes the close coordination of German air and ground operations at Tebourba. (3) The 11th Brigade's losses were recorded as 21 guns in battle and 32 during the withdrawal, leaving 21. Casualties reduced its three battalions to a total of 660, plus stragglers. Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (4) Maj. J. M. Barton, M.C., "The Hampshire Regiment at Tebourba," *The Army Quarterly,* XLVIII, No. 1 (April, 1944), 57–63.

back into the Bizerte stronghold. There we will try to confine him closely while bringing up additional means for the final kill.

7. Success of this plan depends also upon weather, because if protracted rain should set in, every field we have becomes unusable except the tiny one at Bone and the one at Maison Blanche. Bad weather would, of course, also facilitate Axis reinforcement in that our bombing operations would not be effective.[10]

December Decisions on Axis Strategy

The aggressive defense of Tunis which the enemy undertook on 1 December was in conformity with the decision reached earlier at higher levels of Axis command to adhere to an ambitious strategy in northwestern Africa. The Germans abandoned the fiction that they were supporting French interests against the depredations of the Allies. They sought to seize control of the French warships at Toulon, an attempt which on 27 November led to the scuttling of these ships in harbor. Hitler on 30 November ordered Kesselring to disarm the French forces in Tunisia. On 8 December General Gause, sent from Rome to conduct this operation, obliged Admiral Derrien to surrender the elements of his command at Bizerte, thus obtaining in good order and without resistance all the coastal batteries, an arsenal, three torpedo boats, nine submarines, two dispatch boats, some artillery, and the weapons of 7,000 Senegalese and 3,000 others. The troops were eventually removed from Tunisia. The Axis command at the same time began abortive preparations to recruit an Arab legion in Tunisia and to cultivate leaders of the Destourian movement for Arab independence.[11] Admiral Canaris of the German *Abwehr* and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem were scheduled to go to Tunis in December to organize sabotage by pro-Axis Arabs.

The new measures toward the French reflected a modification of the original considerations which prompted the Axis occupation of Tunis and Bizerte. The bridgehead in Tunisia and Rommel's position in Libya were inextricably related. The decision to occupy Tunisia had been made when Rommel's defeat was new, when his army needed a supplementary line of communications, and when warnings of Allied-Italian negotiations in Lisbon cast suspicion on Italian determination to continue the war on the side of the Axis.[12] On both military and political grounds, the creation of the bridgehead had then seemed necessary to prevent the Axis position in the Mediterranean from deteriorating. The speed and vigor with which Axis forces—air, ground, and naval—occupied key positions in Tunisia could not be matched by equally effective command decisions concerning the ultimate exploitation of their bridgehead. Those decisions depended upon the future course of Rommel's army, and what that

[10] (1) Paraphrase of msg, CinC AF to CCS (Review 23), 3 Dec 42, NAF 110. (2) Msg 1248, FREEDOM to USFOR, 5 Dec 42; Msg 291, AGWAR to FREEDOM, 5 Dec 42. ETOUSA Outgoing Cables, Kansas City Rcds Ctr. The latter reports approval by the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

[11] (1) MS # C-065a (Greiner), 30 Nov and 8 Dec 42. (2) Telg, Rahn to *OKW/Amt Ausland Abwehr, Nr. 9358/42 geh IIA5,* in *OKW/Ag Ausland IIA5, Alliierte Landung in Franzoesisch-Nordafrika am 8. November 1942, Band II.* (3) "Les événements de Bizerte, novembre 6–decembre, 1942," *Les Cahiers Français Information,* No. 48 (September, 1943), pp. 20–23.

[12] (1) Telg, Ambassador Huene, Lisbon, to Ribbentrop, Nr. 3739, 9 Nov 42, in State Secretary, German Foreign Office. File copy in Hist Div, Dept of State. (2) Ltr, Stohrer to Weiszaecker, Nr. 5405g, German Embassy Madrid, Secret File. Copy in Hist Div, Dept of State.

course should be was a subject of recurrent strategic discussions among the Axis commanders. Beginning while the race for Tunis was new, their arguments over Axis strategy in Africa extended into January 1943.

Should Rommel's weakened army retire all the way across Libya into Tunisia? Once there, should his command be consolidated with the other Axis forces in order to resume aggressive operations? If an offensive was then begun, should it lead farther westward in French North Africa or should it head eastward once more across Libya to Egypt? On the other hand, if aggressive measures could be sustained only on a scale unlikely to achieve important successes, should not all Axis forces which could be salvaged for the defense of Sicily and Italy be brought back across the Mediterranean? The answers to these questions depended at bottom upon what military resources the Axis powers could commit to operations in Africa. If sufficient organized units could be found, would it be possible to furnish sufficient logistic support?

The Axis high command, except for its temporary frustration on the eve of Allied landings in French North Africa, had a fairly reliable concept of what the Allies would attempt and of the means at their disposal. Its knowledge was not exact but it was generally correct. Kesselring's instructions to Nehring, for example, showed that he had a good grasp of what General Anderson would probably attempt. Rommel had also shown amazing, though fluctuating, success in anticipating the tactics of his adversaries in the desert fighting. The major problem for the Axis high command was to weigh the capabilities of its combat forces and its logistics organization. The estimates submitted by field commanders and emissaries of OKW caused successive conferences and eventual modifications of Axis strategic decisions. Ultimately, each of these plans affected the nature of the enemy's effort in Tunisia; Rommel's withdrawal across Libya to Tunisia became part of the history of Allied operations in Northwest Africa.

On 17 November 1942, on the eve of the first small clashes between Allied and Axis troops in northern Tunisia, Rommel's much depleted *German-Italian Panzer Army* was consolidating after retreating from El 'Alamein as far as the area of Marsa el Brega, near the southeast corner of the Gulf of Sidra. Rommel was then trying to induce his superiors to face the facts of the military situation which resulted from his retreat after failure of the drive into Egypt. Those facts led, in his judgment, to but one conclusion: his army should start retiring by stages without delay at least as far as southern Tunisia and perhaps all the way to northeastern Tunisia. He was trying to prevent orders to stand at the line of Marsa el Brega and to hold it, as the phrase goes, "at all costs." He therefore submitted to the *Comando Supremo* a strong argument for immediate authorization to pull his forces back to Buerat el Hsun, at the western edge of the Gulf of Sidra, and ultimate approval of his making a stand in what he termed the "Gabès Position." That site was a narrows in the coastal plain north of the port of Gabès, where passage was blocked partly by hills and partly by the steep-sided stream bed of the Akarit, with great salt marshes (chotts) on the western flank and the sea on the other.[13]

Rommel's Italian military superiors did not accept these proposals. Aside from the basic question of whether there was to be a

[13] *Panzer Army Africa, KTB,* 17 Nov 42.

retreat at all, two major points were at issue: the timing of Rommel's retreat and the area in Tunisia, if he was to fall back that far, where his army should make its stand. The Italians wanted the maximum amount of time in which to increase Axis strength in Tunisia and to develop there a fortified, unflankable line. They preferred the "Mareth Position," south of Gabès, a fortified zone which the French had designed and which extended between the Matmata hills and the seacoast. Rommel preferred the "Chott Position," farther north. He wished to be free to move his army back when necessary to escape being outflanked at any position in Libya or to avoid being so deeply engaged that extrication of his whole command would not be possible. Contrary to his recommendations, Rommel was ordered to stand at the Marsa el Brega line while added strength was promised to him there, enough to guarantee his hold until he was again ready for the offensive.

Rommel's estimate of the reinforcements and replacements of matériel needed to execute those orders was very large. His realization that the orders were ill conceived led him to make a vain effort on 21 November 1942 to get them changed. But the Italians had gained Hitler's explicit approval and had gotten him to direct Rommel, through Field Marshal Keitel, that he must hold the position at Marsa el Brega. Moreover, the *Comando Supremo* put Rommel under the orders of its representative in Libya, Marshal Ettore Bastico.[14]

Hitler assured Mussolini, and indirectly informed Rommel, that new German tanks, antitank and antiaircraft weapons, and supporting air strength would be sent to Tripolitania. But actually, Hitler was so preoccupied with the Eastern Front, so insistent on treating the Mediterranean as an Italian theater of war, and so unwilling to accept unpleasant truth about conditions and prospects there that his decisions and assurances were correspondingly unreliable.[15]

Almost immediately after this decision had been reached, the Axis high command began to reconsider it, and kept it under review for the rest of the month of November. The principal Axis commanders in the Mediterranean conferred at Arco dei Fileni, Libya, on 24 November 1942 to weigh once more the factors affecting Axis strategy. Kesselring pointed out that if Rommel's army fell back as far as Buerat el Hsun, Allied air bases could be constructed so near to Tripoli that their bombers would soon terminate its value to the Axis as a port. Despite this probability, Kesselring and Cavallero felt compelled to acquiesce in Rommel's judgment that he could be outflanked at Marsa el Brega and therefore had no real choice but to pull back as soon as the British Eighth Army began trying energetically either to pin down his front or to envelop his southern flank. Kesselring concluded that this maneuver would not be long delayed.[16]

[14] (1) *Panzer Army Africa, KTB,* 17–19 Nov 42. (2) Cavallero, *Comando Supremo,* pp. 387–93. (3) Ltr, Mussolini to Hitler, 19 Nov 42, in Ciano Papers, Rose Garden Collection, OCMH. (4) Ltr, Hitler to Mussolini, 20 Nov 42, in von Rohden Collection, OCMH, 4376–53. (5) Instrucs, Rommel to General De Stefanis, 20 Nov 42, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 3, Anlage 404/1.* (6) Rad, Cavallero to Rommel, 21 Nov 42, *ibid., Anlage 420.* (7) Rad, Keitel to Rommel, 22 Nov 42, *ibid., Anlage 241/1.*

[15] (1) Berghof Conference, 19 Nov 42, in *ONI, Fuehrer Conference.* (2) *SKL/1.Abt KTB, Teil A, 1.–30.XI.42,* 20 Nov 42.

[16] (1) Conf notes, *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 4, Anlage 434/4.* (2) *SKL/1.Abt, KTB, Teil A, 1.–30.XI.42,* 27 Nov 42.

Mussolini became reconciled to an eventual loss of Tripolitania as he contemplated the alternative prospect of occupying Tunisia, which had long been an object of Italian imperial claims. He believed that, in order to retain Tunisia, as much time as possible for defensive preparations there must be won by delaying tactics in Libya. He therefore ordered that Rommel counterattack the leading British elements and withdraw only with Bastico's express authorization. Despite those orders, Kesselring was willing to consider decreasing Rommel's force in order to use part of it to check a possible Allied advance from the west against Gabès or even farther, against Tripoli. To put an end to the intolerable contrast between the mission assigned to him and the means provided for its accomplishment, Rommel early on 28 November flew to consult Hitler face to face at his headquarters in East Prussia.[17]

Rommel's venture did not go well. Hitler gave him no opportunity to pass from his proposal of an alternative concept of Axis operations to his reasons for objecting to the strategy being pursued. At the word "withdrawal" he cut him off and insisted vehemently that Rommel's orders were in conformity with the requirements of Axis high strategy and must be carried out. If Rommel needed more men and munitions, he should have them. Hitler therefore quickly arranged for conferences in Rome to consider how the system of supply should be reformed, and for Reichsmarschall Goering, as the Fuehrer's personal representative, to go there with Rommel by special train.[18]

During the train journey, the plan which Rommel had not been allowed to present for Hitler's consideration, that the Axis forces be consolidated in Tunisia to strike at the Allies before they could match the combined Axis strength, and then drive eastward against the British Eighth Army, was outlined to Goering. The early union of the Axis forces in Tunisia could be treated, he was told, for propaganda purposes as a preconceived maneuver responsible for the retreat from El 'Alamein. Victories in Tunisia would galvanize Italian morale as the prospect of a slow bleeding to death in the Tripolitanian desert would not. The Sicilian straits would remain under Axis control and would thus deny passage to the Allies from the western Mediterranean to the rest of that sea. Kesselring came to the train at Rome for a conference preceding the first meeting with Mussolini and his principal military advisers, and neither he nor Goering was wholly favorable to Rommel's proposal. They agreed that there was no longer time enough to convey to Marsa el Brega sufficient means for Rommel to hold there but they decided that retirement west of Buerat el Hsun should not occur. The final decision, as Hitler saw it, would be one for Mussolini to make.[19]

[17] (1) Cavallero, *Comando Supremo,* pp. 400–402. (2) Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass,* pp. 307–13. (3) Rad, Bastico to Rommel, 26 Nov 42, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 4, Anlage 453.* (4) Rad, Rommel to *Comando Supremo,* Bastico, and *OKW/WFSt,* 28 Nov 42, *ibid., Anlage 468/1.*

[18] Rpt, *Reise des OB ins Fuehrerhauptquartier und nach Rom vom 28.XI.42 bis 2.XII. morgens* (hereafter cited as *Rommel Trip*), in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 4, Anlage 494/1.*

[19] (1) Rpt, *Vortragsnotiz fuer Herrn Reichsmarschall von Oberleutnant Berndt ueber die Besprechung am 30.XI.42, 11:00 Uhr,* in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 4, Anlage 494/2.* (2) Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass,* pp. 314–15. (3) *Rommel Trip.* (4) Goering Conference, Rome, in von Rohden Collection, *OCMH,* 4376–44.

The Italians, it was soon discovered, were now ready to adopt Rommel's earlier plan for retirement to the Gabès area. They were induced by German arguments to revise that position and to accept the plan to hold resolutely at Buerat el Hsun, after postponing until the last possible hour withdrawal from Marsa el Brega. Mussolini prescribed that Rommel must avoid the loss by capture of large numbers of unmotorized Italian troop units, as at El 'Alamein, and that the time for retirement must be determined by Marshal Bastico. After six days, the Axis leadership had arrived again at approximately the same course of action as that which the Arco dei Fileni conference had approved. The new element was the attention now given to the main difficulty in carrying out that decision, the necessary degree of logistic support.

Since the one army which Rommel commanded had received inadequate logistical support even before El 'Alamein, it could hardly be rehabilitated unless the line of supply through Tripoli were drastically improved.[20] To bring about such a change while at the same time trying to win a race with the Allies for the possession of Tunisia meant that the logistical support of northern Africa would in effect have to be revolutionized.

Goering presided at a meeting on this problem on 2 December, directing the discussion in a forceful manner without much regard for Italian susceptibilities.[21] He successively brought up certain specific measures by which the transport system from Italy to Africa could be improved. These measures involved vigorous efforts to increase the efficiency of operations and the protection from air attacks at the ports. A double screen of antisubmarine mines could be laid across the Sicilian narrows to Tunisia to insure a safe channel resembling that which the English had established along the coast from the mouth of the Thames River to Scotland. Germany could supply the mines; Italy must lay them. German radar could be installed to help protect the convoys. Matériel for Rommel's army could be forwarded from Tunis to Tripoli on barges and ferries moving along the coast under air cover. Italian submarines could take over fuel and ammunition.

The cargo shipping seized by the Germans in southern French ports which was suitable for the supply lines to Africa must come into service without further delay attributable to questions of jurisdiction between the new Reich Commissioner for Sea Transport, Gauleiter Kaufmann, and the principal German Naval Commander, Admiral Weichold.[22]

Goering's effort to improve the system of supply, while accepting the fact that control over transport would remain Italian, was based on belief that the Italians could be persuaded or pushed into more efficient use of the resources available. He remained in Italy long enough to visit Naples and Sicily and to report his findings to a second Axis conference in Rome on 5 December 1942. In the interval, Rommel had returned, early

[20] (1) *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, 23.X.42–15.I.43,* 27 Oct 42. (2) See also Cavallero, *Comando Supremo,* pp. 334–35 (23 Sep 42), 355 (27 Oct 42).

[21] Present were Cavallero, Riccardo, Fougier, Gandin, Kesselring, Rommel, Gause, Weichold, Pohl, and Reich Commissioner Kaufmann. (1) Cavallero, *Comando Supremo,* pp. 404–05 (1 Dec 42). (2) *Rommel Trip.*

[22] Ltr, Hitler to Mussolini, 20 Nov 42, in von Rohden Collection, OCMH, 4376–53, explained that Kaufmann's mission was to regulate the disposition of these French ships and the small-boat traffic for Libya, Crete, and the Black Sea.

on 2 December, to Tripolitania, having discovered that munitions bound for his army were being diverted to Tunisia, where Allied pressure seemed even more critical. There had not been enough supplies for the urgent needs of both Axis commands in Africa. What reason was there to believe that in the future this deficiency could be overcome? [23]

By 17 December 1942, Rommel had withdrawn his army to the Buerat el Hsun area, as authorized. He had observed so insignificant a change in the miserable trickle of supplies and munitions coming over the shortened line of communications that he could not expect to achieve any substantial build-up there. At a conference on that day with Bastico and others, he therefore renewed the argument in favor of making a fighting withdrawal from Tripoli and concentrating in Tunisia for a stroke towards Algiers. Holding Buerat el Hsun was becoming impossible and defending Tripoli seemed to be pointless. The Axis leadership was again obliged to review a strategic decision only a short time after its adoption.[24]

If Rommel's proposal to withdraw his army to Tunisia for aggressive operations to the west was not accepted on 17 December, it was not for lack of intention to strike offensively toward Algeria. To meet the requirements of just such a purpose, Hitler had recently sent to Tunisia a new commander, Generaloberst Juergen von Arnim, and elevated the headquarters of the Axis forces there to that of the *Fifth Panzer Army*. A competent deputy commander, Generalleutnant Heinz Ziegler, was also designated. Hitler himself had a conference with each of these commanders on the way to their new stations at Tunis, at which both arrived via Rome on 8 December. The transfer from Nehring to von Arnim took place next day.[25] The strategy of the Axis powers was to operate as aggressively in Tunisia as the means allowed, and their intention in December was to deliver to General von Arnim enough forces and logistical support to strike out boldly into French North Africa.

The Action at Djebel el Guessa, 6 December

General Eisenhower would not accept as final the initial failure to penetrate beyond Djedeïda; General Anderson, although far from sanguine, continued therefore to plan for a renewed offensive against Tunis and Mateur. Preparations for such operations were to be made while holding a line which ran along the eastern edge of Djebel Lanserine (569) from Chouïgui pass through Tebourba gap and across the Medjerda river to Djebel el Guessa (145), southwest of El Bathan. The main body of Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, was deployed under General Oliver's command on the southeastern side of the river with the 1st Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, now released from Blade Force and back with its parent unit. Rankled by the recent setbacks at the hands of the German armored forces, the Americans hoped now to fight as a team in conformity with their own doctrine. More British units kept ar-

[23] (1) *Rommel Trip.* (2) Cavallero, *Comando Supremo,* pp. 408–09.

[24] (1) *Panzer Army Africa, KTB,* 17 Dec 42. (2) Opns Rpt, *Fifth Panzer Army, O Qu, Taetigkeitsbericht, Abt Qu 3–OQ Tunis, 15.XI.–31.XII.42.* (3) Cavallero, *Comando Supremo,* p. 411.

[25] (1) General von Arnim had been Commanding General, *XXXIX Panzer Corps,* on the Russian Front. MS #C–065a (Greiner), 4 Dec. 42. Both von Arnim and Ziegler were promoted on 4 December 1942 before leaving for Tunisia. (2) MS # C–090 (Warlimont). (3) MS # C–098, *Erinnerungen an Tunesien* (Generaloberst Juergen von Arnim).

riving in Tunisia in conformity with pre-invasion plans. The 1st Guards Brigade (Brig. F. A. V. Copland-Griffith) reached Bédja on 6 December while elements of the British 6th Armoured Division (Maj. Gen. Sir Charles F. Keightley) began to assemble in the area near Souk el Khemis, Thibar, and Teboursouk for eventual employment south of the Medjerda. (*See Map V.*) Blade Force returned to the 6th Armoured Division.[26]

The French assisted in holding a line east of Medjez el Bab and in preparing for the renewed attack on Tunis. General Juin insisted that Goubellat be held to cover Medjez el Bab from the south. To lighten the load on General Anderson's troops, he gave General Barré responsibility for defending the sector north of Bédja, bringing forward French units from Le Kef and replacing those units by others which General Giraud had planned to send to the Tébessa area. French troops took up positions on the southerly slopes of Djebel el Ang (668), north of Medjez el Bab. In central Tunisia, where Giraud had directed that an advance be made to a line extending northeastward from Gafsa to Sbeïtla and thence through Kesra to Maktar, the French 7th Algerian Infantry with a battalion of 75-mm. guns and elements of the Tunisian Task Force on 3 December seized Faïd pass in the Eastern Dorsal. French forces next occupied Fondouk el Aouareb on 8 December and Pichon on 19 December. Plans were laid to advance toward Pont-du-Fahs and Zarhouan, and even to strike at Kairouan.[27] Thus the French threatened the Axis southern flank and prepared to participate in a renewed Allied offensive.

The pressure for troops to protect the long line of communications against forays by enemy parachutists and other saboteurs at the time of the Axis counteroffensive in early December was severe. The Allied Force command would have preferred to use more French troops in such duties in order to get the maximum numbers of Anglo-Americans, who were better armed, into the advanced zone. The entire ten companies of the Territorial Division of Constantine, plus 300 native customs guards (*douaniers*), and two companies of regulars were used on guard duty at Bône and Constantine, and at bridges and tunnels along the routes across Algeria. The U.S. 39th Infantry Regiment was similarly employed. Throughout December French commitments in advance sectors ran counter to the preferences of the Allied command for French guard troops.[28]

If the Allies intended to resume their offensive, so also did the German *XC Corps*. General Nehring found the means, while holding at other points, to press beyond Tebourba up the Medjerda river valley. Part of General Fischer's command was shifted to the southeastern side of the river to the vicinity of El Bathan and Massicault.

[26] Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[27] (1) Fr CinC Ground Forces in North Africa Dir 2, 30 Nov 42, copy in CSTT Jnl; CSTT Jnl, 4–10 Dec 42. (2) Journal de Marche du 19e Corps d'Armée (hereafter cited as XIX Corps Jnl), 30 Nov–19 Dec 42. (3) Journal des marches et opérations de la Division de Marche d'Alger, 14 Nov 42–9 Jun 43 (hereafter cited as DMA Jnl), 1–8 Dec 42. (4) DMC Jnl, 1–9 Dec 42.

[28] (1) Ltr, Col Julius Holmes to Gen Giraud, 5 Dec 42; (2) Ltr, Giraud to Eisenhower, 6 Dec 42; (3) Memo, Col William S. Biddle for ACofS G–3 AFHQ, 12 Dec 42, sub: Protection of line of communications; (4) Memo, Gen Rooks to Gen Mast for Fr Mil and Air Forces in North Africa, 28 Dec 42, sub: Troops for line of communications defense; (5) Memo, Liaison Sec AFHQ for G–3 AFHQ, 30 Dec 42, sub: Battalion Oranaise. AFHQ G–3 Ops 37/11, Micro Job 10B, Reel 82F, and G–3 Ops 37/13, Micro Job 10C, Reel 157F.

(*Map VII*). The projected attack was to strike along both sides of the Medjerda and to include a wide swing through Furna to approach Medjez el Bab from the southeast. But first, Allied troops had to be driven from Djebel el Guessa, a cluster of hills and ravines which rose abruptly from the flat farm land southwest of El Bathan. Its heights gave perfect observation over an area extending from Tebourba gap to the north to the El Bathan–Massicault road to the east and a broad area to the south. Fire from its bare northern slopes upon the narrow shelf of Tebourba gap could interdict the road there. To clear the Allies from Djebel el Guessa, Fischer planned a major flanking move through Massicault to the northwest and at the same time, a secondary push westward from the area south of El Bathan.

The Allied line was held by the 2d Battalion, 6th U.S. Armored Infantry, and the 8th Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highland Regiment (8/ASH), at Tebourba gap, and the 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, and part of the 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, strung out thinly along the crests of Djebel el Guessa. Enemy preparations were observed on the afternoon of 5 December. An attack was recognized as imminent.

After a night in which German flares kept the area lighted for observation, the attack struck on 6 December at about 0700. Two waves of dive bombers softened up the American defense; then parachute infantry, with machine guns and mortars, began their approach to the northern flank. Soon, supported not only by renewed air strikes but also by other infantry, reinforced by tanks attacking to the west and toward Djebel el Guessa's Hill 145, they began to infiltrate through the saddles of the ridge line to cut off the troops in the northern section of that line. Simultaneously, on the southern flank, the enemy committed an armored force, of the *7th Panzer Regiment*, with some twenty tanks and truck-borne infantry, headed for Hill 148 and thence to Djebel el Guessa. This armored force, after being held up for a while, threatened to penetrate between the Americans on Djebel el Guessa and their line of withdrawal. Its attack caused them to retire hastily with severe losses. Company C, 6th Armored Infantry, became completely disorganized. Battery C, 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, firing in support, drew the enemy armored force against its own positions. It was forced back into a natural cul-de-sac, and although aided by Battery B, of the same unit, in the end its five old-style half-tracks were destroyed and its survivors were captured. But it had won considerable time and claimed to have knocked out at least eight Mark IV German tanks with its 105-mm. howitzers.

To relieve the exposed force at Djebel el Guessa General Oliver dispatched Colonel Bruss's half-strength 2d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment (mediums), later sending in the 2d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, from the north side of the river, and the light tanks of 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment (−) from its assembly area south of Djebel el Asoud (214). Colonel Bruss's force was so late in getting started that the battle around Djebel el Guessa was almost over. General Oliver still hoped to inflict severe damage on the enemy's forces, which ceased advancing and waited southwest of Djebel el Guessa for the counterattack. Bruss divided his battalion into two groups, sending E Company, reinforced, along a narrow strip between the river and Djebel Bou Aoukaz (226) and D Company around the eastern side of that

hill mass, while the enemy took cover. When the group nearest the river emerged from the shelter of the hill, antitank shells swiftly knocked out several tanks, stopping the attack; when the other column appeared later, it too was repulsed. Colonel Todd's 1st Battalion, meanwhile, made a sortie but arrived too late to be of assistance to Bruss's force. After this serious setback, the counterattack was broken off, but General Fischer's forces also pulled back to the northeast without attempting to push farther toward Medjez el Bab.[29] Instead, elements were sent to support the disarming of General Derrien's French forces near Bizerte on 8 December.

The Allies might have reoccupied Djebel el Guessa but did not. The day's battle had been damaging to both adversaries and especially galling to the Allies. The enemy had been able to send a strong battle group against part of a force deployed on both sides of a river and, after overwhelming the exposed forward elements, to meet a counterattack under conditions highly favorable to him. These results were probably all the more satisfactory to the enemy because of American tactical errors. Once again tanks had sallied forth to contend with tanks rather than attacking with mutually supporting weapons, as the situation had demanded. Again they ran into a curtain of antitank fire. But the resulting situation was hardly as unfavorable as the interpretation placed upon it at British 5 Corps headquarters, which ordered the British 11th Brigade Group to withdraw its remaining elements from Tebourba gap along the other side of the river to a new line at "Longstop Gap," the next conspicuously narrow neck between mountains and river southwest of Tebourba gap.[30] On the night of 6–7 December, retirement to this position by General Evelegh's troops made pointless an occupation of Djebel el Guessa. Combat Command B therefore took up new stations at Djebel Bou Aoukaz and Djebel el Asoud, a complicated hill mass east of the Bordj Toum bridge. The Allies were now obliged, in view of General Fischer's initial success, to reappraise the situation.[31]

The Allies Fall Back to a New Line

General Allfrey believed the Allies would be incapable of successfully attacking Tunis for a considerable period. Rather than squander resources to defend territory, he believed that economies should be practiced and the accumulation of reserves expedited by taking safer positions farther west. On 7 December Allfrey proposed falling back to a line extending south from Djebel Abiod through Oued Zarga and Testour to Bou Arada. This meant abandoning Medjez el Bab. Such a step was resisted by General Juin in a conference with General Allfrey

[29] (1) Robinett correspondence with participants in the battle, 1949–50, in his possession, contains recollections of several participants including: Lt. Col. William B. Kern, then commanding officer of 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Regiment; Maj. Philip St. G. Cocke, then commanding officer of Special Platoon, 13th Armored Regiment; Capt. George Simpson, then of 2d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment; Capt. James P. Mayshark (Ret.), then commanding officer of Company E, 13th Armored Regiment; and Capt. Philip G. Walker, then of Company E, 13th Armored Regiment. (2) CCB 1st Armd Div Opns Rpt, 11 Dec 42; 1st Bn 6th Armd Inf War Diary. (3) CSTT Jnl, 6 Dec 42, refers to Allied air as having saved the Americans. (4) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB II, 1.–31.XII.42*, 5 and 6 Dec 42.

[30] The name "Longstop Gap" was derived from Longstop Hill, the British designation for Djebel el Ahmera, east of which the Allies were not again to pass for a long period.

[31] Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

at Barré's headquarters and, when recommended to General Eisenhower by British First Army, was also protested by General Giraud.[32] The Allied commander in chief ordered the defense of a line which ran somewhat farther east and which protected Medjez el Bab.

The Commander in Chief, Allied Force, was by no means unaware of the risks. "I think the best way to describe our operations to date," he wrote at the time, "is that they have violated every recognized principle of war, are in conflict with all operational and logistic methods laid down in textbooks, and will be condemned in their entirety by all Leavenworth and War College classes for the next twenty-five years." He accepted the French views and approved defense by General Anderson's force of a line which ran east of Medjez el Bab, from Tamera on the north through Sidi Nsir, Djebel el Ang, Goubellat, and Bou Arada. From the new base line, the attack was to be resumed when the build-up and the weather made it possible. French troops of General Barré's command were ordered by Giraud to extend the line south of Medjez el Bab through Goubellat, Bou Arada, and Barrage de l'Oued Kebir, and to cover the Medjerda valley, on a line facing south, through Slourhia, Testour, Teboursouk, and Le Kef.[33]

In the complex redistribution of forces, the 1st Guards Brigade (—) was to move to Medjez el Bab the night of 10–11 December and hold there. The 11th Brigade and Combat Command B were meanwhile to withdraw through Medjez el Bab and by 0600, 11 December to take up positions farther west. General Anderson's advanced command post at Aïn Seynour, just west of Souk Ahras, moved back to Constantine, to which Headquarters, British First Army, had already moved from Algiers. Preparations were made during two days of persistent rain. But before the Allies could begin their withdrawal, the enemy struck.

Early on 10 December, the *86th Panzer Grenadier Regiment,* as part of the *Fifth Panzer Army*'s effort to expand the bridgehead, started a two-pronged offensive along both sides of the river, each prong supported by a company of tanks. The *7th Panzer Regiment* began a southerly loop through Massicault, Furna, and Sidi Mediene (later known as "Peter's Corner") to attack Medjez el Bab from the southeast. This regiment (less its *2d Battalion*) was reinforced by elements of the *501st Panzer Battalion,* whose armament included Mark VI ("Tiger") tanks, an antitank company, and a battery of 100-mm. guns.[34] Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, was caught at Djebel Bou Aoukaz in an exposed position. The closest supporting positions were those of British units six to ten miles farther to the west. It was in danger of being cut off on the southeastern side of the

[32] Anderson's letter foreshadowed this proposal. Ltr, Anderson to Eisenhower, 5 Dec 42, in CinC AF Diary, Bk. IV, pp. A–50ff.

[33] (1) Ltr to Gen Handy, 7 Dec 42. Copy in OPD Exec 5, Sec 2, Case 51. (2) Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (New York, 1948), p. 123. (3) Telg, Giraud to Juin, 8 Dec 42, in CSTT Jnl; for Giraud's and Juin's orders, see CSTT Jnl, pp. 71, 73.

[34] (1) *10th Panzer Div, Divisionsbefehl für den Angriff am 10.XII.*, 9 Dec 42, in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB, Anlagen, Geh. und Geh. Kdo. Sachen, Band 1, 16.XI.42–12.I.43.* (2) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB II, 1.–31.XII.42,* 9 and 12 Dec 42. (3) Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, reported 62 light and 22 medium tanks plus 21 Sherman tanks of a detachment of the 2d Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment, at the end of 9 December. Msg CP 408, CP First Army to AFHQ, 1320, 11 Dec 42. AFHQ G–3 Ops 22/5, Micro Job 10A, Reel 5C.

river if enemy forces attacking from Tebourba gap got control of the Bordj Toum bridge at the same time that the enveloping sweep of *7th Panzer Regiment* blocked access to the bridge at Medjez el Bab. The American armored unit fought throughout the day on rain-soaked ground which offered serious hazard to vehicular movement except by road.

An encounter took place at the Allied roadblock on the northwest bank near the railroad station of Bordj Toum, protected by mines laid by the U.S. 16th Combat Engineers and by antitank guns. These were supported by medium tanks of the 2d Battalion, U.S. 13th Armored Regiment, and by 105-mm. howitzers of Battery B, 27th Field Artillery Battalion, firing across the river, as well as by Battery A, 175th Field Artillery Battalion, and the Headquarters Platoon, 13th Armored Regiment, on the northwest side. The engagement stopped the Germans and protected the bridgehead but left it under fire and subject to threat of renewed attack at nightfall. On the east bank, the second prong of the German attack was held back by skillful defense and by soft ground, which limited maneuver. But the attack by the third enemy column, after overrunning elements of the 1st Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, reached a roadblock about two miles east of Medjez el Bab. Elements of the 4th Mixed Zouaves and Tirailleurs Regiment (4 MZI) plus the 3d Battalion, French 62d Artillery Regiment, and another French battery firing from the far side of the Medjerda river held up the advanced section of the enemy column about 1400, after knocking out four tanks and causing other losses.

Combat Command B tried to intercept the main enemy column with a flank attack, using elements of the 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, and of Company C, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion. The Germans turned back to meet this threat. The American light tanks were outgunned by the enemy and mired when they maneuvered off the road; nineteen were lost. The tank destroyers claimed ten German medium tanks knocked out before being put out of action themselves. The enemy had successfully run the gantlet until stopped by the French roadblock and the American counterattack. He then pulled back to Massicault leaving a small blocking detachment at Sidi Mediene. He had suffered only moderate losses, but at the end of the day, both the bridge at Medjez el Bab and that at Bordj Toum remained in Allied possession.[35]

At dusk, the plans for Combat Command B's withdrawal behind the approved line from the southeast side of the Medjerda were arranged in a roadside conference west of Medjez el Bab by Generals Allfrey, Evelegh, Oliver, and Robinett and by visits to other British commanders. British units were to cover Combat B's route, including the vital Bordj Toum bridge. Two platoons of infantry, operating as a patrol, were designated for this mission.

The withdrawal began after darkness. One after another, the units pulled out of position on Djebel Bou Aoukaz and Djebel el Asoud and fell into column on a lateral road leading to Bordj Toum and the sup-

[35] (1) CCB 1st Armd Div AAR, 11 Dec 42. (2) Redding, The Operations of C Company, 701st Tank Destroyed Battalion . . . , MS. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga., 1948–49. (3) Ltr, Capt W. H. Hatcher (Ret.), former CO of Co A 13th Armd Regt, to Gen Robinett, 13 Oct 49. In private possession. (4) George F. Howe, *The Battle History of the 1st Armored Division* (Washington, D. C., 1954), pp. 88–91. (5) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB II, 1.–31.XII.42,* 10 and 11 Dec 42.

posed roadblock. Tanks, half-tracks, trucks, guns, and other vehicles were soon closely bunched on a virtual causeway across a treacherous sea of mud, and remained so as they approached the river. Ahead of them, Company D, 13th Armored Regiment (Capt. Philip St. G. Cocke), with some infantry, crossed at 1745 to strengthen the defense of the bridgehead until the withdrawal was complete. They found no evidence of the covering force and turned toward the railroad station of Bordj Toum and the supposed roadblock. A light engagement with a small German force ensued, the sounds of which started rumors back at the bridge that a German attack was imminent. Occasional shells fell near the bridge. The rumors spread from the head of the column to those in command. They made the position of the withdrawing force seem critical. Rather than stop to reconnoiter, Lt. Col. John R. McGinness, the officer in command, hurriedly ordered the vehicles to reverse and instead of crossing by the Bordj Toum bridge to turn off onto a narrow dirt track which ran near the southeastern bank of the river through Grich el Oued to Medjez el Bab. It was a disastrous error of judgment. The leading vehicles kept going but behind them they left an increasingly churned-up ribbon of mud in which most of the remainder were completely mired. The crews were ordered to abandon them and continue into Medjez el Bab on foot.

Under the circumstances, despite the fact that the tanks and half-tracks had already been brought close to the point of requiring overhaul by hard use and insufficient maintenance, the loss was equivalent to a serious defeat at the enemy's hands.

It was particularly injurious to morale as it became a celebrated instance of frustrated logistical effort.[36] Vehicles could be replaced only by stripping some other unit. The 1st Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, relinquished its matériel and some of its personnel and went back to the Oran area to await a new shipment. The 2d Armored Division in Morocco sent 26 mediums by rail.[37] A few of the mired vehicles were later extricated by determined crews before the enemy closed in. The Germans claimed to have destroyed 36 American tanks, 4 armored reconnaissance cars, 2 antitank guns, 3 armored prime movers, and an undetermined number of guns on 10 December, and during a subsequent mop-up of the

[36] (1) The miring, plus enemy action, deprived Combat Command B of 18 tanks, 41 guns, 132 half-tracked and wheeled vehicles, and 19 trailers. See AAR's of 1st Bn 1st Armd Regt, 1st and 2d Bns 6th Armd Inf, 27th Armd FA Bn, and CCB 1st Armd Div. (2) On 12 December the tanks in operation were reported as follows: headquarters of Combat Command B, 5; headquarters of the 13th Armored Regiment, 5; the 1st Battalion of the 1st Armored Regiment, 17; the 1st Battalion of the 13th Armored Regiment, 6; and the 2d Battalion of the 13th Armored Regiment, 16. The 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, had sent its vehicles back to Grich el Oued during the afternoon and, by doing so, preserved 85 percent of them. The 2d Battalion of the 6th Armored Infantry, whose commanding officer was in charge of the movement, saved 10 vehicles. Telg, Liaison Officer First Army CP to G–3 AFHQ, 2043, 11 Dec 42; Col Richard C. Partridge, Rpt on Inspection of ETF Area, 14 Dec 42, App. C. AFHQ Micro Job 10A, Reel 5C.

[37] (1) 1st Armd Div Hist and Jnl, Vol. I. (2) Memo, AFHQ G–3 for Liaison Sec (Col Biddle), 15 Dec 42, sub: Reply to Giraud. AFHQ Micro Job 10C, Reel 157F. (3) From Morocco, a detachment of the U.S. 67th Armored Regiment (Company G and part of Company H, under command of Capt. Lacey W. Hinley, plus maintenance and medical personnel) reached the Bédja area on 10–11 December. This detachment of 9 officers and 153 enlisted men was attached to the British 78th Division and was ready to take part in the attack beyond Medjez el Bab on 24 December. See *History of the 67th Armored Regiment* (Brunswick, Germany, 1945), pp. 15–16.

battlefield on 11 December, 80 guns, vehicles, and armored personnel carriers.[38]

The Allies could not resume their drive on Tunis until further preparations for a sustained attack had been completed. For some ten days after the Allied withdrawal of 10–11 December, combat was confined to patrolling by ground and air, and to bombing raids by each side. The enemy consolidated his position, moved security elements into dominating heights along the routes northeast of that town, and set up his main line of resistance from Bordj Toum to the road between Furna and Massicault and thence southward to the hills.[39] Meanwhile the Allies built up supplies at the railhead in Souk el Arba, got the railroad between Tabarka and Sedjenane into limited service, and strengthened antiaircraft defenses. Allied forces, American, British, and French, were regrouped for another major thrust above the Medjerda river and for support to the north and south of it.

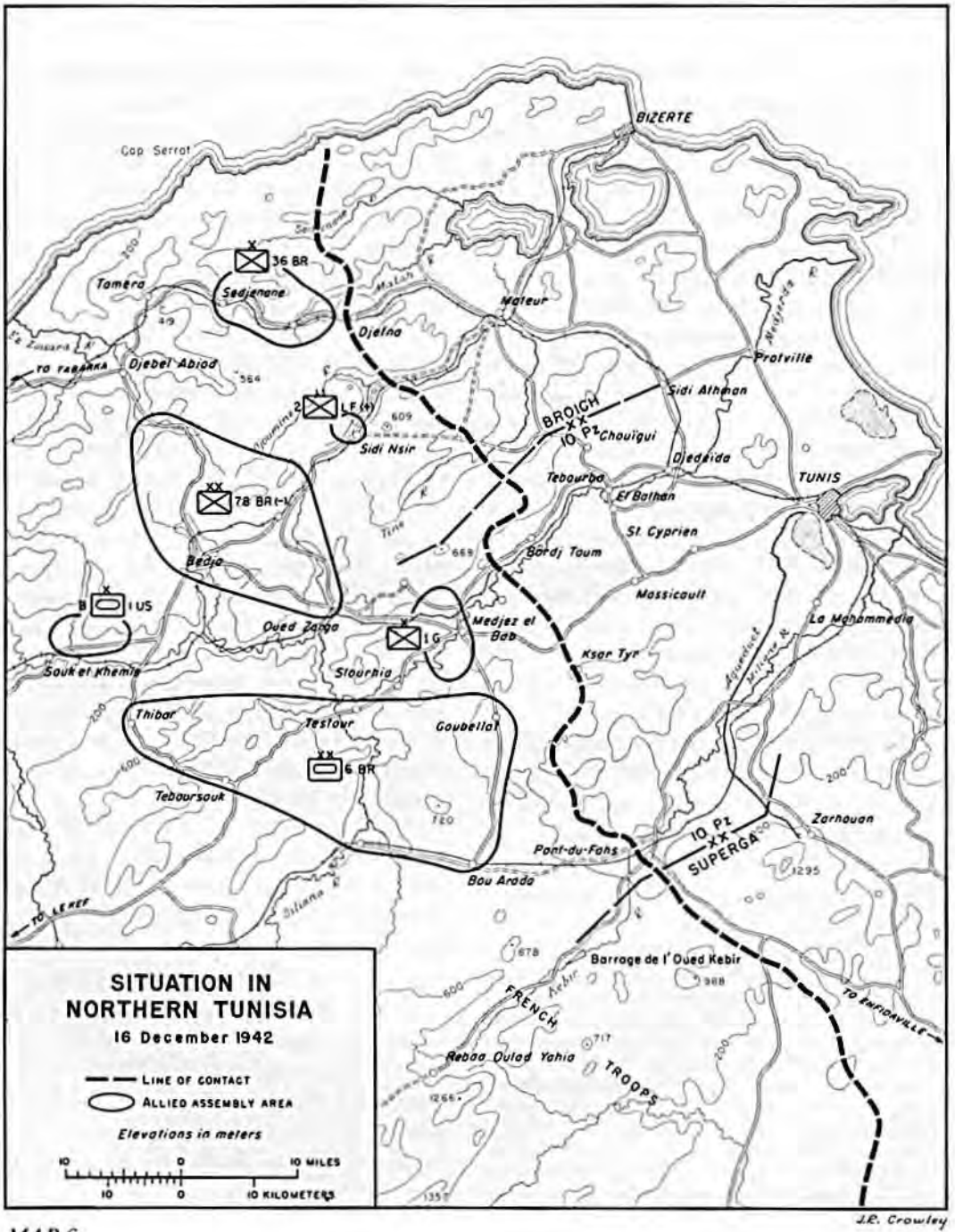
The Allied retirement to the west and the continued arrival of Axis reinforcements in Tunisia permitted General von Arnim to expand the two perimeters protecting Bizerte and Tunis into a general bridgehead. His line became a series of interconnected defense outposts which he endeavored to consolidate. As of 13 December the northwestern part of his front started on the coast about twenty-five miles west of Bizerte, crossed the hills to the south as far as the Djefna position, then bore southeast to cross the Tine river valley; about five miles southwest of Chouïgui pass the line surmounted Djebel Lanserine and near Bordj Toum leapt the Medjerda river. Continuing in a southeasterly direction and passing east of Ksar Tyr, it continued towards the southeast to Zarhouan and the area of Enfidaville. This front was divided into three sectors held in turn by *Division von Broich* from the north coast to the area of the Tine river valley, by *10th Panzer Division* to a point ten miles west of Zarhouan, and by the *Superga Division* in the south and east. The extreme southern flank, beginning at a point southwest of Enfidaville, was under command of General Giovanni Imperiali of the Italian *50th Special Brigade*. Defense of the coast to the north was divided between General Neuffer at Bizerte and the German commandant of Tunis.[40]

On 15 December the *Fifth Panzer Army* ordered a considerable southward movement to begin next day. The *10th Panzer Division*'s sector was extended to include Ksar Tyr and Pont-du-Fahs, the southern edge of good "tank country" in northern Tunisia. (*Map 6*) General von Arnin directed the *Superga Division, Italian 50th Special Brigade,* the *47th Grenadier Regiment,* and the *190th Reconnaissance Battalion* (directly under *Fifth Panzer Army* headquarters) to occupy stations along the

[38] (1) *10th Panzer Div, Ic, TB, 29.XI.42–15.III.43,* 11 Dec 42. (2) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB II, 1.–31.XII.42,* 10 and 11 Dec 42. (3) Deficiencies in Combat Command B's equipment attributable to this experience, to preceding engagements, and to reduced scales in moving from the United Kingdom to Oran amounted on 13 December, despite some replacements, to the following: 50 medium tanks, 84 light tanks, 98 M2 half-tracks, 146 M3 half-tracks, 66 2½-ton trucks, 78 ¼-ton trucks, 72 1-ton trailers, 13 105-mm. self-propelled howitzers, 22 75-mm. towed guns. AFHQ Sitrep 45, 13 Dec. 42.

[39] (1) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB II, 1.–31.XII.42,* 11 and 12 Dec 42. (2) *10th Panzer Div, Ic, TB Anlagen, 29.XI.42–15.III.43,* 12 and 13 Dec 42. (3) MS # T–3 (Nehring *et al.*), Pt. 3a.

[40] *Fifth Panzer Army, Ia, Befehl fuer die Neugliederung der Abschnitte und Befehlsbereiche,* 13 Dec 42, in *10th Panzer Div, Anlagenband geh. Kommandosachen zum Kriegstagebuch 6, 30.IX.42–13.II.43.*


BIZERTE
Cap Serrat
36 BR
Tamera
Sedjenane
Djebel Abiod
TO TABARKA
Djefna
Mateur
Protville
Sidi Athman
BROICH
XX
10 Pz
Chouigui
Djedeida
TUNIS
Sidi Nsir
LF (+)
78 BR (-)
Tebourba
El Bathan
St. Cyprien
Bordj Toum
Massicault
Bedja
1 US
Oued Zarga
Medjez el Bab
1 G
La Mohammedia
Souk el Khemis
Slourhia
Ksar Tyr
Thibar
Testour
Goubellat
6 BR
Teboursouk
Zarhouan
10 Pz
XX
SUPERGA
Pont-du-Fahs
Bou Arada
TO LE KEF
Barrage de l'Oued Kebir
TO ENFIDAVILLE
FRENCH
TROOPS
Rebaa Oulad Yahia
SITUATION IN
NORTHERN TUNISIA
16 December 1942
LINE OF CONTACT
ALLIED ASSEMBLY AREA
Elevations in meters
10 0 10 MILES
10 0 10 KILOMETERS
J.R. Crowley

MAP 6

coast and in the mountain passes of the Eastern Dorsal. They were to occupy and defend the defiles through the mountain chain from Pont-du-Fahs to Maknassy and thence to El Guettar and Kebili in southern Tunisia. They were to recover the pass near Faïd and the other key points at which French troops were installed.

On 16 December the *10th Panzer* and *Superga Divisions* advanced their main line of resistance while the *190th Reconnaissance Battalion* completed its mission as ordered.[41]

Allied aviation, whose overstrained condition had made necessary an interlude before a second drive toward Tunis, was improved and organized for better co-operation. A new Allied offensive required more fighter support of the ground troops, which in turn depended upon preparing forward airfields, bringing up steel matting for runways, obtaining fuel and other supplies, and establishing a rapid flow of replacement aircraft. The air arm of the Allied Force was faced with a monumental task.[42] The number of planes at the forward airfields increased. Intermediate fields at Télergma and Canrobert, southwest and southeast of Constantine, began operations. At Biskra, on the edge of the desert, another field permitted American heavy bombers to operate without plunging into mud whenever they overran a runway. B–17's (Flying Fortresses) and Wellington heavy bombers equipped for night operations used the all-weather field at Maison Blanche and the one paved runway at Blida. Light and medium bombers from Morocco came to Youks-les-Bains.[43] The headquarters of various air commands were scattered and linked by primitive signal facilities. During the forthcoming offensive, control over both British and American tactical air units would be maintained by the principal air officer on General Anderson's staff.[44]

Reducing the enemy's rate of reinforcement to stop him from successfully counterbalancing each increment of the Eastern Task Force was a major objective for Allied aviation. Royal Air Force units based on Malta sank or crippled seven small merchant vessels, including oil tankers, in December, and bombed airfields in Sicily. American and British aircraft of the Eastern Air Command struck repeatedly at the Tunisian terminals of the airlift and at the ports of Bizerte and Tunis. The enemy's improved antiaircraft defenses and numerous intercepting fighters, as well as the network of accessible airfields at his disposal, enabled him to take a high toll of Allied fighter escort. Allied fighter units were worked to the limit to meet the demands for escort missions and sweeps against enemy dive bombers.

The Plans for the Final Attack

AFHQ estimated the effective Allied combat troops at 20,000 British, 11,800

[41] (1) *Fifth Panzer Army, Ia, Befehl fuer das weitere Vorverlegen der Brueckenkopfstellung, Nr. 157/42,* 15 Dec 42, in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB, Anlagen, Geh. und Geh. Kdo. Sachen, Band 1, 16.XI.42–12.I.43.* (2) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB II, 1.–31.XII.42,* 16 Dec 42.

[42] (1) Info supplied by Air Ministry, London. (2) Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces,* II, 87–91.

[43] At Youks-les-Bains 15 fighters plus 17 light and 14 medium bombers were assembled. These were protected by British and American antiaircraft units, by one company of French infantry, by Company L of the U.S. 26th Infantry, and by about 650 service troops of all three nationalities. Memo, Gen Rooks for Gen Gruenther, 20 Dec 42, sub: Garrison of Youks-les-Bains. AFHQ G–3 Ops 22/7, Micro Job 10A, Reel 5C.

[44] Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces,* II, 107–08.

Americans, and 7,000 French, while the opposing Axis forces were set at about 25,000 combat and 10,000 service troops, most of them in the Tunis bridgehead. The enemy was credited with eighty German tanks. The Allies were stronger in long-range artillery, although the enemy's 88-mm. gun was deeply respected. The Allied tanks, though weaker, were somewhat more numerous. It was recognized that Axis aviation would be superior to that of the Allies.[45]

After postponements caused both by adverse weather and by the rate of build-up, General Anderson, under General Eisenhower's prodding, concluded on 16 December that D Day must be set at 23–24 December in order to take advantage of a full moon for night infantry attacks.[46] He intended to concentrate maximum strength on a relatively narrow front for a direct push toward Tunis. This arrangement would make the most of his artillery and antitank resources. He would reduce flank protection to the minimum consistent with safety. He proposed to keep the British 6th Armoured and 78th Divisions in close co-operation and to hold Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division (which he estimated at half-strength), in corps reserve. The attack could be maintained, he believed, for from seven to ten days only.[47]

Headquarters, British 5 Corps, prepared the plan. The attack was again to be along the Medjerda river, but this time with the main effort on the southeastern side. In November, the stream had been a protection for the Allied south flank as the attacking force converged on Djedeïda with the intention of crossing there. In the December attempt, the river was to be a protection for the north (left) flank, and except for a small force using the bridge at El Bathan, the Allied forces would cross it from the northwest at Medjez el Bab and even farther upstream. The two British divisions, 6th Armoured and 78th, with the American 18th Combat Team (1st Infantry Division) attached to the latter, were expected to approach Tunis via Massicault from the southwest. Two artillery groups were organized to support the attack by massed fires. Their employment necessitated maneuver off the roads, which became more feasible as the rains abated for a few days. The Allied center, near Sidi Nsir, was to be held by a mixed force of French and British infantry and American artillery. On the north flank, Brigadier Kent-Lemon's 36th Brigade Group was to threaten Mateur, but Anderson considered his strength sufficient only to contain, not to capture, that town. No parachute or Commando operations in the rear of the enemy were scheduled.

Preliminary to the advance south of the Medjerda river, the Allies had to gain its northwestern bank as far as Tebourba, beginning with the capture of Djebel el Ahmera (290, Longstop Hill), about seven miles northeast of Medjez el Bab. That hill dominated the highway and railroad routes

[45] (1) The estimate is from G–3 AFHQ, Estimate of the Situation in Tunisia, 15 Dec 42. AFHQ G–3 Ops 22/7, Micro Job 10A, Reel 5C. (2) For the actual weekly Italian increment of over 2,000, see daily reports, *German General, Rome,* to *OKW/WFSt* and others, in *OKH GenStdH/Op Abt,* File *Tunis, 10.XI.42–2.V.43.* (3) On 17 December, 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion left the Oran area to reinforce Combat Command B near Medjez el Bab. Msg 337, CTF to AFHQ, 1135, 17 Dec 42.

[46] Msg, Eisenhower to Anderson, 14 Dec 42. Copy in CinC AF Diary, Bk. IV, p. A–79.

[47] (1) Msg, CG First Army to CinC AF, 16 Dec 42. AFHQ G–3 Ops 58/2.1, Micro Job 10C, Reel 188D. (2) See also Anderson's analysis of the prospective condition of First Army on 22 December in Msg 0566, CG First Army to CinC AF, 1900, 15 Dec 42. Copy in AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

between Medjez el Bab and Tebourba, and furnished unimpeded observation over a wide area from its long, knobby crest. The Axis commander had less than a battalion of infantry in positions on the mountain and along the base, particularly at the small railroad station (Halte d'el Heri) near the eastern end of Longstop Hill.

Although the main Allied attack on Tunis was scheduled for 24–25 December, preliminary operations by the 78th Division were planned for each of the two preceding nights to gain the approaches to the Tebourba-Djedeïda area. On 22–23 December, British troops were to seize the village of Grich el Oued on the southeast bank of the Medjerda, a few miles northeast of Medjez el Bab, while a battalion of the Coldstream Guards, followed by the 1st Battalion, U.S. 18th Infantry Regiment, was to occupy Longstop Hill. Next day the 5th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment, on a march through the mountains toward Tebourba gap, would pass through the 3d Battalion, 3d Algerian Infantry Regiment, and that night further advances were scheduled which would regain for Allied troops possession of Bordj Toum bridge, Djebel el Guessa, and Tebourba gap. On 25 December, when the main offensive began, the left flank of the main thrust at El Bathan–Tebourba–Djedeïda would be held by the British 11th Infantry Brigade.[48]

The main Allied attack was prefaced by operations which the French Army undertook on the southern flank, a drive to gain possession of the commanding heights at the juncture of the Eastern and Western Dorsals. The objective was the high ground from Djebel Fkirine (988), to Djebel Zarhouan (1295), south and east of Pont-du-Fahs. Rebaa Oulad Yahia was occupied on 16 December, but during the next four days, while Col. Marcel Carpentier's reinforced 7th Moroccan Infantry Regiment continued northeastward, the *Superga Division* also strengthened its outposts with armor, self-propelled guns, and air support. The first lunge of the French was stopped on 22 December after two days' fighting had gained the Barrage de l'Oued Kebir at considerable cost. A second attempt in greater strength, directed by Gen. Maurice Mathenet and supported by small Allied units of armor, antitank guns, and aviation, was made on 27 December, also without success. These operations were co-ordinated with others by the Eastern Task Force, but a unified command over the whole Allied front was not yet in existence.[49]

General Giraud proposed to General Eisenhower on 17 December that the supreme command in Tunis should now pass to him, in general agreement with a formula indicated in the discussions at Gibraltar, when he was ready to become the French leader in Northwest Africa. He reminded the Allied commander in chief that an estimated 40,000 French troops were in the forward area. The proposal required some satisfactory accommodation of Giraud's claims, for the French troops, though ill equipped, were essential both to cover the

[48] (1) 78th Div Opns Order 4, 21 Dec 42. (2) CT 18 FO 7, 21 Dec 42.

[49] (1) French losses, 20–22 December, were 14 killed, 95 wounded, and 58 missing. They captured 10 German and 26 Italian soldiers. CSTT Jnl, 20–22 Dec 42. French losses in the 27–29 December attack were 37 killed, 156 wounded, and 188 missing. They also lost 9 American-made tanks and 9 guns. Captured were 7 German and 122 Italian prisoners. CSTT Jnl, 27–29 Dec 42. (2) Msg, CinC AF to CCS, 17 Dec 43, NAF 43.

southern flank of the Eastern Task Force and to deliver aggressive pressure at selected points. General Giraud was not willing to put French units under General Anderson's command. Despite the need for unified control, its exercise by Giraud could not be reconciled with military and political realities. The Allied commander in chief later resolved the problem by creating an advance command post at Constantine through which he himself would co-ordinate the parallel operations of French, British, and American commands; however, long before the activation of the post in January, Giraud had been diverted by other problems of great urgency.[50]

During the night of 16–17 December a small raid on Maknassy was carried out by eighty selected men from Company L, U.S. 26th Infantry, under Lt. Col. John W. Bowen. They struck the town from the flank and rear with complete surprise to the much larger garrison. They took twenty-one Italian prisoners from the *Ariete Division,* men who had survived El 'Alamein and arrived at Gabès on 10 December as members of the Italian *50th Special Brigade,* but who were now, within a week, taken out of combat.[51]

In preparing for a possible Allied offensive, Kesselring chose to strengthen von Arnim's command in Tunisia rather than meet Rommel's insistent requirements for the means of making a stand at Buerat el Hsun. On 17 December, when Rommel argued the futility of keeping his army there in view of the failure of the supply line and the inadequacy of the men and matériel he had been receiving, Kesselring assured von Arnim in Tunis that both men and matériel would soon be on the way to him. Three regiments of infantry and the truck transport with which to motorize the reserves would come to Tunisia. Stevedores and cranes from Italy would speed up port operations. Air support would take the form which von Arnim requested—strikes on the concentration areas and close support during future engagements. The Axis command also called for an extensive program of sabotage by parachutists and glider-borne troops intended to disrupt Allied supply traffic between the ports and the front, and to delay Allied advance to the coast in the vicinity of Sfax and Gabès. This attempt (Operation *RIGA*) was frustrated for the most part by Allied countermeasures.[52]

The Engagement at Longstop Hill

The second Allied attempt to take Tunis, it will be recalled, was to be preceded during the night of 22–23 December by the seizure of Grich el Oued by a reinforced company of the 3d Grenadier Guards and the capture of Longstop Hill by the 2d Battalion, Coldstream Guards. After Longstop had been secured, the Coldstreams were to hand it over before dawn to the 1st Battalion, U.S. 18th Infantry, and return to Medjez el Bab in order to participate in

[50] CinC AF Diary, 17 Dec 42.

[51] (1) Lt Col W. S. Myrick, Jr., AGF Obsr's Rpt, 27 Jan 43. Copy in OPD 381 Africa, Case 61. (2) Phone Msg, Maj Balfour to G–2 AFHQ, 17 Dec 42. AFHQ G–3 Ops 22/6, Micro Job 10A, Reel 5C. (3) Ltr, Bowen to Col Stark, 22 Dec 42. Copy in 26th Inf AAR, 24 Apr 43.

[52] (1) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB II, 1.–31.XII.42,* 16 and 17 Dec 42. (2) Order, *Fifth Panzer Army,* 18 Dec 42, in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB, Anlagen, Geh. und Geh. Kdo, Sachen, Band 1, 16.XI.42–12.I.43.*

the main phase of the attack on Tunis.[53]

Longstop Hill, the objective of this initial phase of the attack, is not quite seven miles to the northeast of Medjez el Bab. (*Map 7*) The mountain, rising to more than nine hundred feet, is separated from the higher ground to the west by a saddle, to the north by a small basin that widens into the plain of Toungar. Between the eastern slopes and a loop in the Medjerda river is a gap, less than half a mile wide, where a railroad station, Halte d'el Heri, is located. The dominating ridge stretches for almost two miles in an east-northeasterly direction and is marked by a succession of knolls, the highest being Point 290, near the center of the crest. At the far end, separated by a ravine from the main feature, rises another somewhat lower hill, Djebel el Rhar (243). The tactical significance of this hill, even its existence, had not been discovered during the reconnaissance for the attack.[54]

The battalion plan was to capture Longstop Hill by advancing with two companies on the left, via Chassart Teffaha, to take the col with one of them and secure the crest with the other. Meanwhile a third company, proceeding along the main road, was to take Halte d'el Heri. The reserve company, following the same route, would be assembled at the southern base of the hill close to the battalion headquarters.

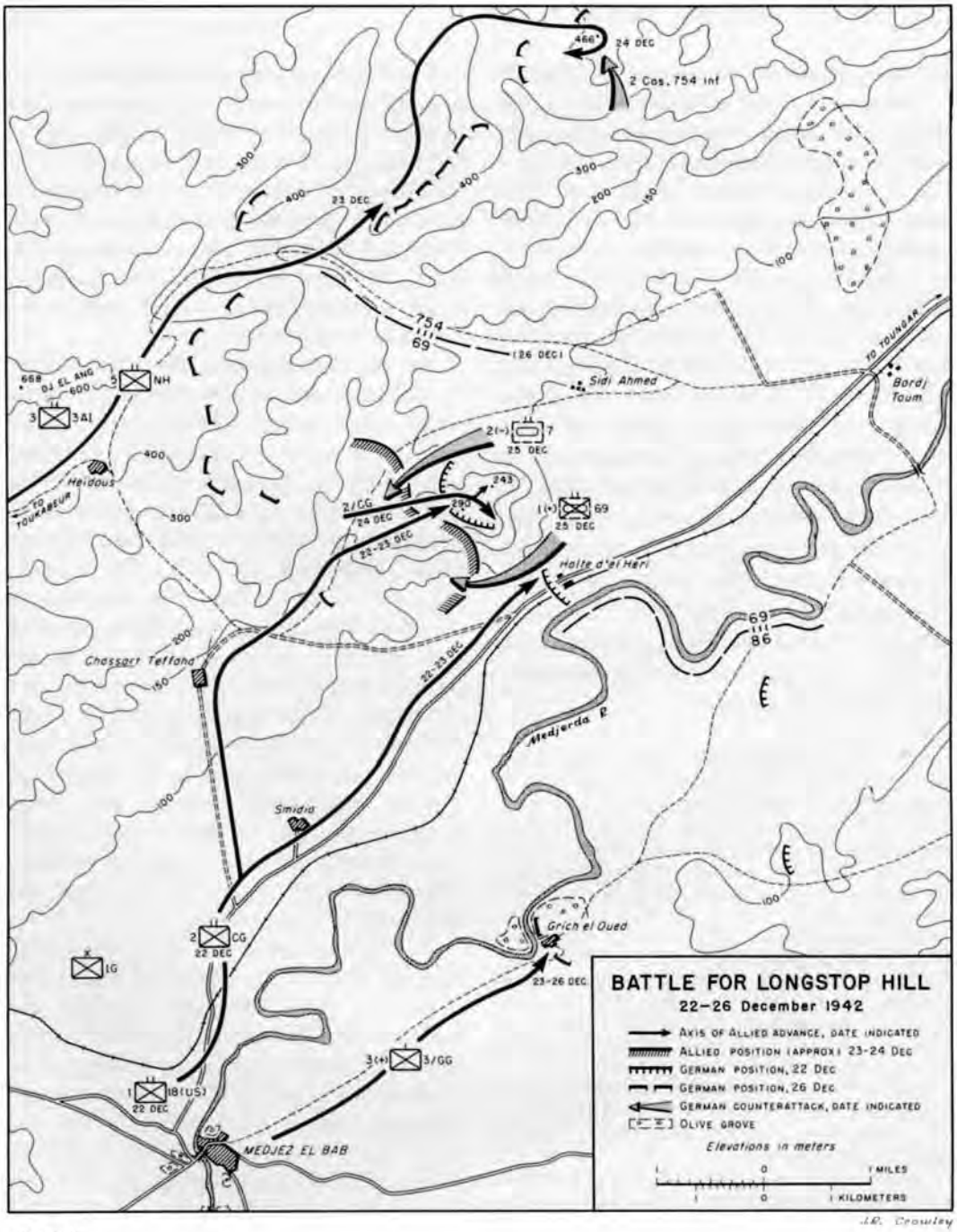
On the German side, the *69th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* with attached elements of the newly arrived *754th Infantry Regiment,* both under the command of Colonel Lang, held the line north of the Medjerda, the boundary between Lang's sector and the one held by the adjoining *86th Panzer Grenadier Regiment,* south of the river. During the night of 21–22 December elements of the crack *69th Panzer Grenadiers* who had occupied positions on the hill and at the railroad station had been relieved by two companies of the hastily organized *754th Infantry Regiment.* To speed up their commitment the men had been shipped to Tunisia with hand weapons only. They occupied the line without special equipment, lacked organic transport, and consequently had been unable to carry their full basic load of ammunition.

The German main line of resistance ran through Point 290, Djebel el Rhar, and Halte d'el Heri. The latter position was well protected by mine fields, some of which were not known to the Allies. As early as 21 December enemy artillery observers on Longstop Hill had recognized substantial Allied movements in the vicinity of Medjez el Bab. Patrols had reported Chassart Teffaha and Smidia reoccupied by the Allies. At noon, the next day, German air confirmed these reports. When the attack started, it lacked the element of surprise.

[53] (1) Info supplied by the Cabinet Office, London. (2) 1st Bn 18th Inf AAR, Engagement at Longstop Hill, 20 Mar 43. (3) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB II, 1.–31.XII.42,* 22–26 Dec 42. (4) Rpt, *Auszugsweise Abschrift aus dem Gefechtsbericht ueber die Kaempfe vom 23.–25.XII.42,* in *10th Panzer Div, Ic, TB Anlagen, 29.XI.42–15.III.43, Anlage 40.* (5) Lt. Col. E. R. Hill, "The Coldstream at Longstop Hill," *Army Quarterly, XLVIII,* No. 2 (July, 1944), 175–80. (6) MS # D–173, *Die Kaempfe der Kampfgruppe Lang in Tunisien (10 Pz. Div.) Dezember 1942–15, April 1943* (Col Rudolf Lang). (7) *334th Inf Div, Ia, KTB, 1.XII.42–4.IV.43,* and *Anlagen zum KTB Nr. 1, 14.XI.42–15.I.43.*

Combat Team 18 of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division moved up from Oran with elements of the U.S. 36th Field Artillery Regiment (155-mm. guns) for the final attack.

[54] Although Djebel el Rhar has been described as masked during reconnaissance and not shown on the map used by the Guards battalion, it is clearly shown on Sheet 19 (Tebourba) of the 1:50,000 map published by the British War Office in 1942 and attached to the 78th Division's attack orders held by Combat Team 18.


24 DEC
2 Cos. 754 Inf
466
300
400
23 DEC
400
300
200
150
100
754
69
(26 DEC)
TO TOUNDAR
Bordj Toum
Sidi Ahmed
668
DJ EL ANG
600
5 NH
3 341
400
Heidous
TO TOUKABEUR
300
2(-) 7
25 DEC
2/CG
24 DEC
243
290
1(+) 69
25 DEC
22-23 DEC
Halte d'el Heri
69
86
Chassart Teffaha
200
150
22-23 DEC
Medjerda R.
100
Smidia
2 CG
22 DEC
1G
Grich el Oued
23-26 DEC
3(+) 3/GG
1 18(US)
22 DEC
MEDJEZ EL BAB
BATTLE FOR LONGSTOP HILL
22–26 December 1942
Axis of Allied advance, date indicated
Allied position (approx) 23-24 Dec
German position, 22 Dec
German position, 26 Dec
German counterattack, date indicated
Olive grove
Elevations in meters
0
1 MILES
0
1 KILOMETERS
J.R. Crowley

MAP 7

The British troops who engaged in the preliminary attack advanced through heavy rains which began late in the afternoon, 22 December, and continued throughout the night. Grich el Oued was taken without opposition and held until 26 December, but vehicles had to be sent back lest they be trapped in the mire. The company of the 3d Grenadier Guards (3/GG) relied henceforth on mules for transport.

North of the river the 2d Battalion, Coldstream Guards (2/CG), executed the initial phase of its assault according to plan. It secured Longstop Hill as far as Point 290; it also reached the railroad station. The green troops of the *754th Infantry Regiment,* disheartened by the powerful Allied artillery preparation, soon exhausted their ammunition, and after a valiant effort to defend their position, with bayonets only, some elements withdrew. Things appeared to be going well for the Allies. But then the Germans counterattacked at the railroad station and drove the Coldstream Guards back. A reserve platoon which the Guards committed in an attempt to stabilize the situation ran into an antipersonnel mine field. The British commander, under the mistaken impression that he held all of Longstop Hill, abandoned the attack and left the Germans in control of Halte d'el Heri.

The 1st Battalion, U.S. 18th Infantry, had meanwhile begun its advance from Medjez el Bab, but had fallen somewhat behind schedule. The British commander expected two of the U.S. rifle companies to take the route via Chassart Teffaha and the others including the battalion headquarters to follow the main road. The Americans, however, were disposed to take the left road with three companies, including the heavy weapons company and battalion headquarters, while sending only Company A and the battalion antitank platoon to Halte d'el Heri. The guides left by the Coldstream Guards to lead the several units into position either missed them in the dark rainy night, or did not know where to take them. The resulting confusion made orderly relief quite impossible. While the two commanding officers finally managed to meet at the British command post, their headquarters never did link up. At 0430 the 1st Guards Brigade ordered the Coldstream back to Medjez el Bab. The battalion, under the impression that only a handful of the enemy remained to be mopped up, left the hill before all positions previously held by them were reached by the Americans. The existence of Djebel el Rhar had gone unnoticed.

In the morning of 23 December the Americans realized that they held little more than half of Longstop Hill. Company A, reinforced by tanks, struck again for the railroad station, advancing between the road and Longstop Hill's eastern slopes. In the gap a reinforced panzer grenadier company successfully enveloped most of the company, capturing or killing all but one officer and thirteen men. Meantime the *1st Battalion, 69th Panzer Grenadier Regiment,* had counterattacked the Americans dug in on the hill. Strong German elements circled the northwestern base of the Longstop massif and drove the Americans off Point 290. By 1500 Colonel Lang reported all positions of his former main line of resistance recaptured. An hour later the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, supported by British artillery, launched a co-ordinated counterattack against Point 290. In the face of determined German resistance the attack failed. By 1800 the U.S. battalion had to take up defensive positions to the west and south. B Company was now in an advance position

on the knob closest to Point 290 with C and D Companies in support. Communications were exceedingly difficult. Wire lines were frequently cut; the radios got soaked in the heavy rain and failed. Those still operational were handicapped by the screening effect of the hills.

After the first setbacks the commanding officer of the 18th Infantry, Col. Frank U. Greer, requested reinforcements, lest the whole mountain be lost. The Coldstream, back at Medjez el Bab since 1030, were the only reserve available. The 1st Guards Brigade now ordered them back. One company returned during the afternoon to the scene of its night battle, but it was not until late at night that the rest of the battalion was assembled at the entrance to the col. In the drenching rain all roads beyond Chassart Teffaha had become impassable. There were no mules to take the place of motor vehicles.

As both sides brought up additional forces, the battle for Longstop Hill came to a temporary halt. The enemy had watched the battle with deep concern. General von Arnim, his chief of staff, and General Fischer came forward during the day to Colonel Lang's command post near the hill. Early in the morning von Arnim had sent elements of the *7th Panzer Regiment* and an organic 88-mm. flak battery of the *10th Panzer Division* to Toungar. The *2d Battalion, 69th Panzer Grenadier Regiment,* was rushed to Tebourba gap. Additional elements of the *754th Infantry Regiment* were also brought up and attached to Colonel Lang's command.

In accordance with the Allied plan the 5th Northamptons, during the night of 22–23 December, had embarked on the highly difficult mission of advancing through the mountains from Toukabeur via Heïdous and Sidi Ahmed to Tebourba gap. At noon (1235), meanwhile, 5 Corps had decided to postpone the main Allied attack, continuing only the battle for Longstop Hill. Desperate efforts were immediately undertaken to reach the Northamptons and order them back, but planes sent out were unable to locate the battalion in the cloud-covered mountains. The Germans, however, had been warned by Arabs. Patrols sent out confirmed the threat to Colonel Lang's right flank. In the afternoon two companies of the *754th Infantry Regiment* were dispatched to drive the British off Hill 466, some four miles north of Longstop Hill. In a bitter night engagement the Germans succeeded, but before this reassuring news could reach the German command the panzer grenadiers on Longstop had been almost driven off the mountain.

By 0600, on 24 December, the Coldstream Guards had again assembled in the col. This time the battalion planned to pass one company through B Company, 18th Infantry, still clinging to the hill opposite 290. The Guards company was to clear the ridge all the way to the east. It would thus be in a position to dominate the gap. Another British company would follow in support, while one reserve company would be held in the col. The fourth company was organized into carrying parties. At 1700, two hours before dark, the attack went off. Following closely behind a rolling barrage, the Coldstream again drove the Germans off the crest, "but when No. 4 [Company] reached the final peak they saw in the failing light what had never been appreciated—Djebel el Rhar staring at them across a gully. They thereupon inclined to the left and gallantly attempted to deal with this new objective. It was found, however, to be strongly held and to be a much larger area

than any one company could possibly cope with." [55]

Nevertheless the Coldstream temporarily reached Djebel el Rhar's highest peak, Point 243, but in the darkness evidently never realized it. From the north slope the Germans continued to subject the companies to accurate and devastating mortar fire, while the men were struggling to dig in on the rocky crest as best they could.

For the German command Christmas Eve had brought a serious crisis. Colonel Lang's forces were still fighting to eliminate the threat to their right flank. The units on Longstop Hill had been driven off the massif and were regrouping in the eastern re-entrants. Losses had been painful, though considerably below those of the Allies.

Faced with this situation Lang decided to counterattack the next morning. A small group in the center of the German line was able to regain Point 243 on Djebel el Rhar during the night. This unit was ordered to hold down the Allies with strong frontal fire. Armored elements of the *7th Panzer Regiment,* swinging around the northern slopes of Longstop Hill, were to advance to the saddle, destroy the Allied troops there, and exploit by pushing toward the southern entrance of the pass. The main attack would round Longstop Hill's base from the east with the objective of completing the double envelopment.

On Christmas Day, 0700, the enemy struck his final blow. In the col a company of French native troops without any antitank weapons was quickly dispersed by the German armored thrust. When the French withdrew they exposed the Allied left flank. The enemy's main-effort group, personally led by Colonel Lang, caught the Americans from the rear. The Coldstream Guards were thus isolated in their position on top of Longstop Hill. The Allied situation soon became untenable and when the Germans retook 290 by 0900, General Allfrey ordered his troops to withdraw. Against stubborn resistance the Germans took all of the remaining knobs of the hill, but when they sortied toward Chassart Taffaha they were stopped by mine fields and the 3d Grenadier Guards who had been committed on the high ground to the east of the village. The enemy remained on Longstop Hill, and for understandable reasons called it thereafter "Christmas Hill."

Losses during the four-day engagement had been heavy. American casualties amounted to nine officers and three hundred and forty-seven men; the Coldstream Guards lost one hundred and seventy-eight officers and men.

Obviously a number of mistakes had been made in the planning and execution of the attack. Insufficient reconnaissance contributed to the fact that Longstop Hill was never completely captured. Requiring one battalion to secure the objective and perfect the transfer in the same night was asking the impossible. The Allied troops also lacked air support, largely owing to the weather conditions. During the decisive German counterattack on Christmas Day artillery support was highly unsatisfactory because the forward observers had been withdrawn the night before and were unable to return.

On 24 December, at 5 Corps headquarters, General Eisenhower and General Anderson had reached the conclusion that the weather dictated an indefinite defer-

[55] See Lt. Col. E. R. Hill, "The Coldstream at Longstop Hill," *The Army Quarterly,* XLVIII, No. 2 (July, 1944), 175–80, which conflicts at many points with 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, After Action Report, Engagement at Longstop Hill, 20 March 1943.

ment of the second Allied offensive aimed at capturing Tunis. After all troops which had moved east of the 11 December line had returned during the night of 25–26 December it was evident that not even the preliminary phase of the Allied attack, with the objective of gaining the approaches of the Tebourba–Djedeïda area, had been realized. With the greatest reluctance, General Anderson and General Eisenhower in Constantine concluded that the race with the Axis forces had been lost. Tunisia would have to be taken by a prolonged struggle and with a strategy substantially revised.

In his periodic review for the Combined Chiefs of Staff, General Eisenhower indicated that the initial, opportunistic phase of operations would now be followed by initiative in another quarter while the vast supplies and reinforcements needed to capture Tunis and Bizerte were slowly being accumulated.

The Allied Force would begin reorganizing immediately. Weather would not permit resumption of the attack in northern Tunisia for about two months. Acknowledging that abandonment of the attempt to capture Tunis was a severe disappointment, the Commander in Chief, Allied Force, deemed the evidence conclusive that any attempt to make a major attack in northern Tunisia under existing conditions would be to court disaster.[56]

[56] (1) Msg, 5 Corps to AFHQ, 2353, 23 Dec 42. Copy in AFHQ CofS Cable Log. (2) Msg, Eisenhower to CCS, 26 Dec 42.

PART FIVE

CONCENTRATION OF FORCES IN TUNISIA

CHAPTER XVIII

The New Situation: Allied Reaction

The failure of the final phase of Operation TORCH required a major revision of Allied strategy in Africa and considerable modification in the Allied chain of command. The pressure for an early capture of Tunisia was intensified by an Allied decision in January at highest levels to seize Sicily. To meet their timetable, the Allies had to win Tunisia by early spring. Furthermore, they had to prepare for a Sicilian attack at the same time that they built up strength, improved efficiency, and made a final successful drive. A full-scale offensive in northern Tunisia could not be resumed until after the winter rains were over, normally about the end of March.

One of the aims in the original concept of operation in Northwest Africa—trapping Rommel's rump army in Tripolitania between a British force in Tunisia and the westward-moving Eighth Army—had to be jettisoned. It was now apparent that Rommel would have to be driven back into Tunisia, and that the Eighth Army should itself continue west of Tripoli. The final stage of operations in Tunisia would thus become a struggle between two pairs of armies. Each adversary would be faced with hard problems in co-ordinating tactical operations and in meeting the logistical requirements of these forces. By the middle of January, decisions made at the Casablanca Conference had determined the new strategy in Africa and the changes in Allied command structure. Before those decisions were made, the Allied Force had reviewed and agreed on appropriate tactical readjustments to be executed forthwith in the form of offensive operations in central Tunisia.

Central Tunisia: The Terrain

Although some attention was paid to the terrain of central Tunisia in Chapter XV, it will be helpful at this point to look more closely at some of its features. Central Tunisia lies between latitudes 36° north and 34° 30′ north. (*See Map V.*) Sousse on the coast, about ninety miles south of Tunis, and Kairouan, about thirty-six miles inland from Sousse, are near its northeastern corner. Maharès at the southeast and Gafsa at the southwest are at the border betwen central and southern Tunisia, closely linked with each. Djebel Zarhouan (1295), at the yoke of the inverted Y from which the Eastern and Western Dorsals flare to the south and southwest, is well within northern Tunisia, as is Le Kef near the Algerian border. The mountain chains, the intermediate plateaus between them, and the lesser hills which divide these plateaus into a series of valleys, were to be the scene of many actions before the major campaigning returned to northern Tunisia in April.

On the coastal plain, Kairouan and Sfax began serving the Axis powers as early as November as bases for defense forces which operated toward the west. Detachments were installed at vantage points in the East-

ern Dorsal; beyond them in the interior, mobile patrols and a few outposts ranged the sparsely settled, semiarid region. Kairouan, a holy city and the goal of perennial Moslem pilgramages, was the hub of many roads and tracks across the coastal plain. The city was connected with the interior by two main roads, the most northerly of which was a route over the saddle between Djebel Halfa (572) and Djebel Ousselat (887) to the valley and village of Ousseltia. The other road forked southwest of Kairouan, one branch climbing over Djebel ech Cherichera (462) to Pichon, the other rising more gradually to penetrate the mountain chain through Fondouk el Aouareb gap on the way to Hadjeb el Aïoun. Sfax was connected with the interior by a good road through Faïd pass, seventy-five miles inland. The road branched after reaching the interior plain, one fork running northwestward to connect with Sbeïtla and the other southwesterly through the village of Sidi Bou Zid and Bir el Hafey to Gafsa. Maharès, on the coast south of Sfax, was connected both by road and railroad with Maknassy and Gafsa. Few of the towns and villages were of any great size, the largest, Sfax, with about 45,000 in 1942, having almost twice the population of Kairouan, and about nine times that of Gafsa, while all the others were smaller.

The plateau immediately west of the Eastern Dorsal is generally lower than the one along the base of the Western Dorsal. It is subdivided, moreover, into four major sections, of which the northernmost is the Ousseltia valley at the apex of the triangular area between the two mountain chains. That valley is separated from the Pichon basin by higher ground which extends westward toward Maktar from Djebel Ousselat. To the south is the area adjacent to Pichon, drained toward Kairouan by the Marguellil river and its tributaries. This section is rimmed with hills and high ground except at the southeastern corner, where the river flows near the base of the precipitous Djebel Trouzza (997) and out through Fondouk el Aouareb gap. Far more extensive is that portion of the eastern plateau which starts to widen south of Djebel Trozza, and which extends as far south as Djebel Meloussi (622) beyond Sidi Bou Zid. The fourth area of the lower plateau lies between the ridges of which Djebel Meloussi forms a part and the corner at which the Eastern Dorsal swings to the southwest toward Gafsa. Sbeïtla and Bir el Hafey are near the irregular limit between the eastern and western plateau. Sbiba, Kasserine, and Fériana lie at the other edge of the upper level, near the base of the Western Dorsal.

Five main routes through the Western Dorsal connected the interior plateaus with the mountainous area between the Western Dorsal and the Algerian border: (1) into northern Tunisia north of Djebel Bargou (1266) to the Rebaa Oulad Yahia valley and thence to Siliana and on to Le Kef; (2) via Maktar, northwest of Pichon, across a high basin ringed by higher hills; (3) through Sbiba and Ksour; (4) by the defile northwest of Kasserine into the Bahiret Foussana valley, and thence through the Monts de Tébessa to Tébessa, or by skirting them at the north, through Thala; and (5) by one of the gaps in Djebel Dernaïa (1204), northwest of Fériana, to Tébessa. Tébessa, near the center of a high plain at the eastern edge of Algeria, was linked with Souk Ahras, seventy-five miles north-northwest by road and railroad, which continued to Bône on the coast, sixty-five miles farther.

Central Tunisia's hills and mountains are in general barer, sharper in contour, and

more varied in color than those of northern Tunisia. The plateaus and valleys are much eroded and are covered with bunch grass, with cultivated cactus patches on which the Arabs feed their animals, and with scrub growth along some of the streams. Water draining from the higher slopes across the intermediate plateaus has been impounded and since Roman times drawn to the coastal towns by aqueducts. Farms are fewer in central Tunisia than farther north, for the rainfall through much of the year is as light as, from December to March, it is plentiful. In the wet season the powdery top soil becomes slushy mud, and the many dry stream beds fill with water and justify the bridges which at other times seem superfluous. Many ancient ruins have survived for nearly twenty centuries. Sousse has its extensive Christian catacombs; Maktar, Sbeïtla, and Kasserine, their Roman triumphal arches; Sbiba, Sbeïtla, and Kasserine and innumerable other places, the remnants of many a mausoleum, Roman bath, or temple. Near Siliana is the site of the decisive Battle of Zama of the Second Punic War. In earlier centuries, the soil of central Tunisia apparently sustained a large population and was dotted at many points with olive orchards and other cultivation which no longer can be maintained. Here in this wide area of camel tracks and tarmac roads, dry fords and steel bridges, palm-fringed oases and treeless plains, the war in Tunisia was to be fought.

Operation SATIN and Related Problems

At AFHQ operations possible in January and February were under study at the same time that the final winter drive down the Medjerda valley was coming to a halt. Among the moves considered likely were subsidiary attacks in northern Tunisia to pin down enemy forces and take advantage of local situations, since the *Fifth Panzer Army* there would be protected against a major Allied offensive for many weeks by the weather. But if the British Eighth Army adhered to the schedule reported to General Eisenhower by General Alexander from Cairo on 27 December, Rommel's army would be pursued into southern Tunisia late in January. Allied Force operations to weaken or destroy the *German-Italian Panzer Army* would be in order, and central Tunisia would be the likely scene.[1]

What form should the operations in central Tunisia take? Should a mobile American armored force attempt to disrupt Rommel's line of supply? Although success in such a venture was likely to bring a large reward, certain hazards were involved. The *Fifth Panzer Army*'s line in the north might be thinned without enabling General Anderson to punch through to Tunis. General von Arnim might be able to gather enough armored strength for an attack southwestward through the French sector to strike the American force on a vulnerable northern flank. Whether the *Fifth Panzer Army* did so or not, the *German-Italian Panzer Army* would certainly move quickly to protect its line of communications, the nature of its counterblows depending upon how much freedom of maneuver the pursuing British Eighth Army allowed. Rommel's force might be substantial, in which case it could strike effectively either independently, or in conjunction with a force from General von Arnim's command. The Americans would then be opposed by experienced German armored units, whose pres-

[1] (1) Cbl, CinC AF to CCS, 29 Dec 42, NAF 61. (2) Butcher, *My Three Years With Eisenhower*, pp. 228–31.

tige at that stage of the war it would be difficult to exaggerate. Furthermore, the Americans would then find themselves engaged in a hard all-out fight against battle-seasoned veterans instead of gradually supplementing their training by small and successful actions—a method more conducive to full combat efficiency. But in spite of these hazards, Operation SATIN, for understandable reasons, remained one of the projects favored by the Americans. An outline plan for such an attack toward Sfax was approved at AFHQ on 28 December.[2]

General Eisenhower believed that the British First Army had worked hard and "fought well," and he intended that it should eventually "deliver the decisive blow." [3] This role might justify General Anderson in curtailing First Army's local attacks in the next few weeks, thus enabling it to husband its resources rather than use them up in supporting the proposed attack farther south. After all, which would be the main effort—that toward Sfax or that toward Tunis? It might be better to abandon the American project and to concentrate American armor in a mobile force-in-being on the southern flank of First Army, thus deterring Rommel's possible aggressive inclination in that area. Despite such considerations the Commander in Chief, Allied Force, concluded that the immediate Allied objective was not the capture of Tunis and Bizerte but the destruction of Rommel's army. He tentatively approved planning for the risky thrust to the coast. General Anderson then agreed to make the subsidiary attacks intended to aid Operation SATIN but proposed to retain Combat Team 18 of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division for the purpose. He was allowed to keep that unit until infantry of the British 46th Division (Maj. Gen. H. A. Freeman-Attwood) should have arrived in the forward area to relieve it.[4]

The Allied situation not only required a revision in theater strategy and some appropriate tactical adjustments but presented interrelated problems of command. General Giraud, it will be remembered, had proposed on 17 December that he be appointed Eisenhower's tactical commander in chief over the whole Tunisian front. Giraud would not accept a relationship which put British First Army in command of French forces. For a time, a union of French and American forces under an American commander was considered. Such a solution was affected by the fact that the American preinvasion plans provided for eventual organization of American units in an American Fifth Army to be commanded by General Clark. An American Fifth Army controlling American and French troops in a zone south of British First Army would not have provided unity of command along the whole Allied line and would have created a rather exalted headquarters for an American force of the proportions contemplated.

On 30 December, while the plan was pending, General Clark and Maj. Gen. Carl Spaatz (USAAF), surveyed the prospective battle area and considered the steps necessary to achieve genuinely effective co-ordi-

[2] (1) Memo, Lt Col R. H. Barry for Brig C. S. Sugden, 22 Jan 43. AFHQ G–3 Ops 58/1.6, Micro Job 10C, Reel 188D. (2) Msg, FREEDOM to AGWAR, 29 Dec 42, CM-IN 12717.

[3] Msg, FREEDOM to USFOR (Eisenhower to Ismay for Churchill), 1550, 28 Dec 42. ETOUSA Incoming Cables, Kansas City Rcds Ctr.

[4] The British 139th Brigade was in the forward area by 19 January after landing at Algiers. The remainder of the 46th Division came on the next convoy and reached the forward area by 3 February. Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

nation between ground and air units. But with a decision against an American command in Tunisia of Army grade, General Clark soon went to Oujda, west of Oran, to activate the American Fifth Army there, while the American force in Tunisia was designated an army corps. General Marshall was prepared to arrange the promotion of either Patton or Fredendall to a lieutenant generalcy at once, if such action would help to meet the problem of unifying command over French-held sections of the front. In the end, General Eisenhower picked Fredendall to command the II Corps in central Tunisia and the Tébessa area, and the French remained independent.[5]

On 1 January 1943 the Eastern Task Force was renamed British First Army and the Commander in Chief, Allied Force, assumed direct command of military operations on the entire front. He exercised that control through an advanced command post (FAIRFIELD) at Constantine. In charge of that station as Deputy Chief of Staff, Allied Force, would be Maj. Gen. Lucian K. Truscott, Jr. Between U.S. II Corps and British First Army, the Detachment of the French Army would be commanded from a forward post by General Juin, who would control two zones, that of General Barré's Tunisian Troop Command at the north and that of XIX Army Corps under General Koeltz at the south. In due course, all units of the three nationalities found in areas assigned to control by the others would be sorted out and concentrated with forces of their own nationality, but during the intervening period some units would be attached to the major command of whatever zone they happened to be in. The XIX Army Corps was to turn over to II Corps the Constantine Division (General Welvert). The Tunisian Troop Command was to make five battalions of French infantry available to British First Army and to leave one entire groupement (Colonel Bergeron) in the British zone. French units thus placed under the tactical orders of an American or British commander were to remain under control of headquarters of either XIX Corps or Tunisian Troop Command in all other respects (supply, administration, discipline). All other French units stationed in the American or British zones were to remain entirely under the command of Generals Barré or Koeltz. In case of an unexpected inroad by the enemy, the various French or Allied Force elements in any zone would, within the intent of their missions, obey orders of the local headquarters regardless of nationality.[6]

Headquarters, U.S. II Corps, began moving to Constantine from Oran on 4 January. One week later, its main section was operating there near Headquarters, British First Army, while an advance command post under Brig. Gen. Ray E. Porter opened in Tébessa. Eventually General Fredendall's headquarters moved southeast of Tébessa to a wooded hillside in which underground corridors were constructed while the advance command post went to Gafsa. While plans for Operation SATIN were being prepared, the troops to be under Fredendall's command shifted from northern Tunisia or came eastward from Morocco and Algeria.

[5] Memo by Gen Eisenhower for the record, 25 Feb 43, in CinC AF Diary, Bk. V, pp. 265a–65e.

[6] (1) Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe,* p. 125. (2) Dir, Fr Army Detachment to XIX Corps, CSTT, *et al.,* 14 Jan 43. Transl in AFHQ G–3 Ops 37/4, Micro Job 10B, Reel 81F. (3) Msg, Juin to II Corps, 16 Jan 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 150.

Three alternative schemes for this operation were recognized. Plan A prescribed the seizure of Sfax, with the subsequent possibility of a northward advance along the coast toward Sousse; Plan B called for an initial attack farther south, at Gabès, followed perhaps by a northward move against Sfax; Plan C specified the capture of Kairouan, continuation to Sousse, wrecking its usefulness to the Axis, and withdrawing when that became necessary. Whichever the plan adopted by the Commander in Chief, Allied Force, the force to execute it was to operate directly under AFHQ, with a tentative D Day of 22 January.[7]

Generals Eisenhower, Anderson, Juin, and Fredendall, conferring on 11 January at Constantine, reached final decisions on Operation SATIN. The Commander in Chief defined the mission as acting aggressively against the enemy line of communications in the direction of Sfax, interrupting its use as much as possible, and he assigned the undertaking to General Fredendall's U.S. II Corps. The force was to be comprised of the following: the U.S. 1st Armored Division (Maj. Gen. Orlando Ward); the U.S. 26th Combat Team (Col. Alexander N. Stark, Jr.); the British 1st Parachute Brigade, less one battalion (Brig. J. W. C. Flavell); the French Constantine Division (Maj. Gen. Joseph Edouard Welvert). The British Middle East Command was to load ships which it would hold at Malta and send into Sfax when II Corps specified, thus supplementing the attenuated line of supply through Tébessa from Algiers.[8] Generals Anderson, Juin, and Fredendall by further agreements at the conference clarified other points necessary for good interallied co-operation along the wide front.[9]

General Fredendall planned to station a mobile force in the area between Hadjeb el Aïoun and Sbeïtla for the immediate support of the French should the enemy counterattack from Kairouan but to attack with the bulk of his command from Gafsa to Gabès and thence north along the coast to Sfax. This plan received General Eisenhower's tentative approval.[10] Detailed planning for the operation soon diverged considerably from AFHQ's outline of 28 December. A force at first set at 20,000 to 25,000 men rose to be more than 38,000. The axis of attack adopted by General Fredendall threatened to lengthen the line of supply to such an extent and to delay the acquisition of Sfax for so long, that a daily draught on reserve supplies accumulated at Tébessa might be necessary. AFHQ did not supervise the detailed planning closely enough to discover these deviations and attendant problems until they emerged during commanders' conferences from 10 to 14 January, when the specter of logistical overextension raised its head.[11]

After the Allied Force thus had worked

[7] II Corps AAR, 2 May 43.

[8] (1) Msg, Eisenhower to CCS, 12 Jan 43. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[9] (1) Rcd of mtg between Anderson, Juin, and Fredendall, at Hq First Army, 11 Jan 43. Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (2) Msg 101, Adv CP AFHQ to AFHQ, signed Truscott, 15 Jan 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 144.

[10] During a conference with General Fredendall at Télergma, Algeria. Memo, Gen Rooks for Gen Truscott, 14 Jan 43. AFHQ G-3 Ops 58/1.6, Micro Job 10C, Reel 188D.

[11] (1) Memos: Chief Admin Officer AFHQ for CofS AFHQ, 12 Jan 43; G-4 AFHQ for Chief Admin Officer AFHQ, 12 Jan 43; Gen Rooks for Gen Truscott, 14 Jan 43; Brig A. T. de Rhe Philipe for Chief Admin Officer AFHQ, 15 Jan 43; Telg, CinC AF to First Army, 1547, 12 Jan 43. AFHQ G-3 Ops 58/1.6, Micro Job 10C, Reel 188D. (2) In March II Corps began supporting almost 90,000 men over the same line of communications.

out its problems of reorganization and unified command and had formulated a plan of action to which he had given tentative approval, Eisenhower on 15 January flew to Casablanca to report to his superiors at the second conference of Anglo-American military and political leaders (SYMBOL).[12]

The suburban community of Anfa, adjacent to the great Moroccan city, had been requisitioned for the first full-scale gathering of these men in more than six months. The hotel and neighboring villas were requisitioned, a barbed wire barrier thrown around the area, and the site officially termed the "Anfa Camp." From 13 to 23 January 1943, the Combined Chiefs of Staff met formally at fifteen meetings, while the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the British Chiefs of Staff Committee, the two groups which made up the Combined Chiefs, met separately at other times. On three occasions during the conference, the Combined Chiefs of Staff met with the President and the Prime Minister to consider the agenda, to discuss the matters at issue, and to arrive at a final report of decisions taken. The relatively sunny comfort which prevailed and the general atmosphere of buoyant confidence which surrounded the President and the Prime Minister contrasted sharply with conditions east of Algiers.[13]

The site, the fact that the security and "housekeeping" arrangements for the conference were responsibilities of the Allied Force, and the fact that some of the deliberations were connected with current operations in Africa, associated the Anfa Conference with the campaigns of Northwest Africa. Yet its major purpose was to determine the Allied objectives for 1943 in all theaters, to establish priorities among them, and to reach decisions on the preparation and allocation of means to attain them. These and other conclusions overshadowed arrangements concerned with the forthcoming battles in Tunisia.

Before a meeting of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, and then at the first plenary session of the Casablanca Conference, General Eisenhower reported on the current and prospective operations in Tunisia. Gen. Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the British Imperial General Staff, quickly questioned the justification for such risks as those he recognized in the projected Operation SATIN. General Alexander, newly arrived from Cairo, indicated that the British Eighth Army would reach Tripoli before the end of January, perhaps just as the scheduled attack on Sfax was starting. No assurance could be given that Rommel's forces would then be pinned down by the Eighth Army's pressure and thus unable to intervene at Sfax. General Montgomery's command might well be temporarily immobilized. Fuel and supplies would certainly be low while the port of Tripoli was being cleared and restored to service.

It was apparent that if the attack on Sfax was begun by 23 January, it might well provoke a counterthrust which the American force would have to withstand unassisted. But if it were made at a later date, Eighth Army would then have moved into Tunisia on Rommel's heels and would be a factor limiting his action at Sfax. After a further conversation with General Alexander, therefore, General Eisenhower agreed that the attack should be canceled for the time being, and that if undertaken

[12] The first conference was the ARCADIA Conference held at Washington soon after the Pearl Harbor attack.

[13] (1) See Official Casablanca Conference Book. (2) Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, Ch. XXVII.

later it would be carefully co-ordinated with the operations of the British Eighth Army. He returned to Algiers on 16 January with the American portion of his command held on a very short leash.[14]

On 18 January General Eisenhower prescribed at a commanders' conference in Constantine that operations on the southern flank must be defensive and that as much as possible of II Corps, particularly the 1st Armored Division, was to be held in mobile reserve.[15] He issued a directive to this effect at noon, 20 January.[16]

The New Chain of Allied Command

The Combined Chiefs of Staff at Anfa adopted a new system of command for the Mediterranean theater, one affecting each of the three major arms. The changes would go into effect in February. They agreed that a boundary should be drawn, extending from that between Tunisia and Tripolitania to Corfu, to separate the military area under the Commander in Chief, Allied Force, from that of the British Commander in Chief, Middle East. After General Montgomery's Eighth Army had crossed this boundary, it would pass to General Eisenhower's control, although continuing to draw its supplies from Egypt. At the same time, General Alexander would leave Cairo to assume command over a newly formed headquarters (18 Army Group) and to succeed General Clark as Deputy Commander in Chief, Allied Force.

Allied naval forces also underwent an adjustment aimed at better direction of future operations in the Mediterranean. Admiral Sir Andrew Browne Cunningham was to change his designation from Commander in Chief, Naval Expeditionary Force, to the traditional Royal Navy title of Commander in Chief, Mediterranean, while Admiral Sir Henry Harwood, in the eastern district of the Mediterranean, became Commander in Chief, Levant. Admiral Cunningham was to retain important powers over the employment of all Royal Navy units in both parts of the Mediterranean.[17]

The basis was laid also for creation of an American naval command in the western Mediterranean subordinate to the Allied Naval Commander in Chief, Mediterranean (Admiral Cunningham). Designated U.S. Naval Forces, Northwest African Waters, it was organized in February 1943. The U.S. Eighth Fleet under Vice Adm. H. Kent Hewitt began operations in March looking in particular toward the invasion of Sicily.[18]

Allied air strength in the Mediterranean was placed under one air commander in chief directly under General Eisenhower. Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder received that designation. His principal sub-

[14] (1) CCS 57th and 58th Mtgs, 15 and 16 Jan 43. (2) Anfa 1st Mtg, plenary session, 15 Jan 43, Official Casablanca Conference Book. (3) Rommel's army was estimated by General Alexander to be reduced to less than 60 tanks and 20,000 German combat effectives, plus 30,000 German and 30,000 Italian troops from whom aggressive fighting could not be expected. (4) On 30 January, II Corps reported that 213 medium and 111 light tanks were "operational." First Army Sitrep, 31 Jan 43.

[15] (1) CinC AF Diary, Bk. V, p. A–160 (18 Jan 43). (2) Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, p. 140, cites this passage of diary. (3) Ltr, Eisenhower to Anderson, 26 Jan 43. AFHQ G–3 Ops 58/2.1, Micro Job 10C, Reel 188D.

[16] Msg, AFCP to CG II Corps 1200, 20 Jan 43, par. 3. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 190.

[17] (1) CCS 63d Mtg, 20 Jan 43, Item 4. (2) History of Allied Force Headquarters and Headquarters NATOUSA, December 1942–December 1943, Pt. II, pp. 123–25. DRB AGO. (3) Msg, USFOR to FREEDOM (COS to CinC AF), 2205, 3 Feb 43. ETOUSA Outgoing Cables, Kansas City Rcds Ctr.

[18] Morison, *U. S. Naval Operations*, II, 225.

ordinates were to be General Spaatz, as Commander of the Northwest African Air Forces, Air Chief Marshal Sir Sholto Douglas as Air Officer Commander in Chief, Middle East, and the Air Officer Commanding, Malta. General Spaatz's command was subdivided along functional lines. Pressing need to co-ordinate the air resources of the U.S. Army Air Forces and Royal Air Force in eastern Algeria and Tunisia without waiting for a more permanent arrangement brought into temporary existence on 4 January the Allied Air Forces. General Eisenhower, with the approval of the British Chiefs of Staff, placed this force under command of General Spaatz, who had for the preceding month been the principal Allied Force staff officer for air while retaining his status as Air Officer, ETOUSA. His chief of staff at Algiers was Air Vice-Marshal J. M. Robb. The two existing major headquarters, Twelfth Air Force (U.S.) and Eastern Air Command (Br.), were preserved, but their responsibilities were modified in order to leave, with a single major exception, one subordinate headquarters in charge of each major type of air operations. Strategic bombing was the job of XII Bomber Command. Offshore reconnaissance, convoy protection, and the defenses of ports fell to the coastal segment of the Eastern Air Command. The exception was that support of ground operations was divided: Royal Air Force 242d Group continued to support the British First Army while the XII Air Support Command moved eastward from Morocco to take over (on 10 January) the control of air co-operation with the U.S. II Corps.[19]

[19] (1) Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces*, II, 106–13. (2) Msgs 4140 and 4269, FREEDOM to USFOR, 4 and 5 Jan 43. ETOUSA Incoming Cables, Kansas City Rcds Ctr.

Giraud Replaces Darlan

A flare-up of political problems bearing on the future of the whole Allied war effort in Europe came at the end of Operation TORCH. This situation was precipitated seven weeks after the landings by the assassination in Algiers on 24 December of the French High Commissioner, Admiral Darlan. The resulting emergency required General Eisenhower's abrupt return from the Tunisian front, where he and General Anderson had been making critical decisions in connection with plans for the final try for Tunis. The new regime in Algiers, vital as it was to the Allied cause in Northwest Africa for other reasons, was even more significant as an opportunity to promote unification of all anti-Axis Frenchmen able to take up arms. Darlan's administration rested upon a military agreement with the Allied commander in chief which had brought aid to the Allies but only after first involving the American and British governments in a torrent of adverse criticism and in the problems of French factionalism. The opprobrium with which this military arrangement was greeted began later to moderate, and as time went on some hope appeared for a working relationship between Darlan's anti-German following and the anti-German and anti-Vichy Frenchmen in General de Gaulle's growing organization. Darlan had begun to speak, shortly before he was murdered, of retiring from political leadership.[20]

Up until the last moment, the Fighting French nonetheless continued to fear that the admiral would make permanent the temporary arrangements for his control over

[20] Msg, Murphy via Eisenhower and Marshall to Hull, 24 Dec 42. AFHQ AG 336/36, Micro Job 24, Reel 78D.

civil administration in Northwest Africa and elsewhere. At the very outset, he took the title of High Commissioner, established an Imperial Council, communicated with the diplomatic representatives of Vichy France in several countries, and sought ties with the civil governors of some French overseas territories. Apparently he wished to make Algiers the actual center of government instead of Vichy. In the opinion of de Gaulle's followers, Darlan's actions were hardly consonant with a temporary military expedient; to them it seemed, moreover, that after its eventual liberation, France would be delivered to the exponents of French fascism. This was perhaps the most troublesome repercussion of what was labeled at the outset and repeatedly denounced thereafter as the "Darlan deal." [21]

Attempts through intermediaries to establish a basis of co-operation between the Fighting French and the pro-Allied Frenchmen in Africa began in December. Gen. Georges Catroux, one of the outstanding military figures to join the Fighting French, on 12 December met at Gibraltar a former member of his staff then serving with Admiral Darlan. General Catroux was reliably informed that, contrary to his previous beliefs, the French in North Africa were actually mobilized and actively engaged against the Axis forces in Tunisia; he was also advised that Admiral Darlan was greatly preferred in North Africa, especially among the armed forces, to General de Gaulle and his associates. The suggestion that General de Gaulle, General Catroux, and others should soon replace Admiral Darlan in Algiers was described as certain to produce internal disturbances, annulment of the agreement by which French West Africa was being joined to French North Africa, and adverse consequences elsewhere.[22] On 20 December, Gen. François d'Astier de la Vigerie arrived at Algiers for discussions looking toward amalgamation of the Fighting French of London with the French fighting in Northwest Africa, but found his mission was premature.[23]

The government in French North Africa in 1940–1942 had followed the example of Vichy in establishing press censorship, political imprisonments, and repressive treatment of native Jews. Communist delegates of the French Chamber of Deputies had been incarcerated in French North Africa on charges of hindering the war effort during the period when Stalin was allied with Hitler. Outspoken Gaullist sympathizers were assembled in concentration camps. As a further complication, the proverbial anti-Semitism of the Moslems in French North Africa intruded in the situation. Some 25,000,000 Mohammedans in the three major territories treated the 350,000 Jews with deep and inveterate hostility. Fascistic organizations of war veterans and others adopted methods of terrorism towards Jews, Communists, or Gaullists of a sort with which the world was distressingly familiar. Darlan, in his administration of French North Africa, had to deal with these kinetic facts in such a way as to allow the fighting in Tunisia to be carried on without hindrance.

[21] The arrangement was approved by Stalin, the Soviet dictator, who expressed his opinion in the Russian proverb that, for military purposes, one must be able to use "even the Devil himself and his grandma." Copy of excerpt from translated note, Stalin to Churchill, 28 Nov 42. OPD Exec 10, Item 63.

[22] Rpt, Murphy to Leahy, in Msg, FREEDOM to AGWAR, 14 Dec 42. AFHQ G–3 Sec, Micro Job 24, Reel 79D.

[23] Butcher, *My Three Years With Eisenhower*, pp. 225–26.

Complaints that Vichy's policies in French North Africa were kept in force under Darlan soon reached disturbing proportions. The admiral's administration met an Allied request for information with a memorandum, "Notes on the reforms undertaken by the High Commissioner in French Africa," which General Eisenhower forwarded to General Marshall on 13 December 1942.[24] The commander in chief believed that Darlan, in a month's time, had made a sincere effort to go as far as local conditions would permit in the way of reforms. The pace was deliberate in an attempt to avoid offending Arab susceptibilities, for Admiral Darlan was under pressure from Arab leaders to improve the position of their people.

On the day preceding Christmas, Darlan explained to Murphy what changes had taken place or could be expected, after which the two men discussed at considerable length French individuals outside areas of Axis occupation who might have the talent and ability necessary to succeed Darlan if he should retire.[25] That noon, at a luncheon, he dwelt again on the theme of his prospective retirement. In midafternoon, Darlan was shot down at his office in the Palais d'Été and died at a hospital soon afterward.[26]

General Giraud was informed of the assassination when he arrived at a French command post in Le Kef that evening to supervise the forthcoming French attack. The death of Darlan brought an end to the arrangement which had freed Giraud from political matters, and permitted complete attention to the conduct of military operations and the rebuilding of a French Army. He started back to Algiers that night, arriving on Christmas afternoon. There, as military commander in chief, he ordered an immediate court-martial of the assassin. He was condemned to death and executed early next morning.[27]

Generals Clark and Smith, with the cooperation of Darlan's deputy, General Bergeret, were able to cope with the situation in Algiers until General Eisenhower returned. News of the assassination was suppressed until preparations had been taken to forestall possible disorders, planned or spontaneous. American troops in Algeria and Morocco were held ready to meet any new hostilities. Members of Darlan's Imperial Council were summoned. They met the crisis on 27 December by swiftly agreeing on General Giraud as High Commissioner. Whatever claims might have been made for General Noguès, he showed no eagerness for the place and proposed the selection of General Giraud. The others—Boisson, Châtel, and Bergeret—overcame Giraud's objections to the post. The choice was known to be welcome to the Allied commander in chief and was probably acceptable to many Frenchmen in North Africa and West Africa who had been opposed to Giraud on 8 November.

The death of Darlan in many respects relieved the Allies of a burden in their relations outside French Africa—his co-operation with the Allies had not been able to

[24] AFHQ AG 336, Micro Job 24, Reel 78D.

[25] Msg, Murphy via Eisenhower and Marshall to Hull, 24 Dec 42. AFHQ AG 336/36, Micro Job 24, Reel 78D.

[26] The youthful murderer was identified eventually as Fernand Bonnier de la Chappelle, but his motives and accessories were not publicly disclosed. Kammerer, *Du débarquement Africain au meurtre de Darlan*, pp. 615–28.

[27] (1) Giraud, *Un seul but: la victoire,* pp. 70–79, says no appeal could be taken from the court-martial. (2) Kammerer, *Du débarquement Africain au meurtre de Darlan*, pp. 625–28.

extinguish his record as a collaborator with the Nazis. But in the theater of war, he had become, as General Eisenhower described him somewhat earlier, "the source of all our practical help. . . . All the others including Giraud await his lead and will do nothing definite until he speaks. So far he has refused us nothing. If he is playing a crooked game with us locally it is so deep that he can afford to give away initial advantages of every kind, even those upon which our existence depends in our present attenuated conditions." [28] Although he had caused difficulties outside French North Africa, he had kept his promises to the Allies most effectively.

At the time of Darlan's death, another political storm was in the making because of an Allied agreement, upon Darlan's request, to recall to Algeria the experienced colonial administrator, Marcel Peyrouton, former Resident General of Tunisia. Frenchmen equal to the tasks of governing Algeria were rare. Peyrouton had the qualifications. But he had once been directly involved in some of the most unsavory acts of the Vichy government, and although he had finally withdrawn because of his implacable opposition to Laval's pro-German policies, he could not be put in a position of power without reviving deep antipathies and sharp distrust. His return was arranged, despite admonitions from the Department of State, on the ground of military necessity, a factor which that department later agreed was controlling.[29]

In the bewilderingly complex role of administering territories populated by such discordant elements, both native and European, General Giraud proved less competent than his predecessor. He was not only less competent but less interested, for as indicated earlier, his paramount concern was with military measures; political problems were for him a dragging nuisance. Moreover, sensitive over the subordinate position of the French, he requested that they be treated as an ally in accordance with the promises stated to General Mast at Cherchel, repeated in Mr. Murphy's letters to Giraud just before he consented to leave southern France, and embodied in the "North African Agreement" negotiated by General Clark with Admiral Darlan. While the Allied commander in chief was well aware of this obligation, President Roosevelt held a different view. He thought that General Eisenhower should have put the Imperial Council's selection of Giraud in the light of a nomination rather than a choice, and that he should have impressed on General Giraud that his position depended directly upon his capacity to provide the kind of government required by the Allies to support the war effort.[30] This misconception General Eisenhower firmly challenged in a letter to General Marshall, and it was not allowed to animate subsequent relations with Giraud in Africa.[31] Giraud succeeded Darlan as a leader of the French who accepted a voluntary association with the Anglo-Americans in Northwest Africa. Unlike the latter, he did not claim to be giving effect to Marshal Pétain's secret thought. Nor could he hold the Allies to promises which had once been made to him in return

[28] Msg, Eisenhower to Marshall, 3 Dec 42. Copy in CinC AF Diary, Bk. IV, pp. A–38, A–39.

[29] Msg, AGWAR to FREEDOM, 12 Dec 42, CM-OUT 4072.

[30] Min of Conf at White House, in prep for Casablanca Conf, 7 Jan 43. OPD Exec 10, Item 45.

[31] (1) Msg, Eisenhower to Marshall, 5 Jan 43. WDCSA 381 Africa Jan–May 43. (2) Eisenhower's rpt to conf at Anfa in Official Casablanca Conference Book. (3) CCS 57th Mtg, 15 Jan 43, Item 2.

for undertaking leadership since Darlan, and not he, had actually filled that role. The North African Agreement remained in force and regulated the relations between the Allied Force and the French North African civil and military administration.

French Factionalism Persists

Giraud had been in office less than one month when another crisis occurred in Anglo-American relations with the French. This crisis arose from the fact that the Allies still maintained separate relations both with the French in Algiers and with de Gaulle's organization in London, despite the manifest desirability of unifying all anti-Axis French forces. Efforts in this direction were under way. Darlan's death had stopped de Gaulle on the very brink of departure for a conference in Washington with President Roosevelt. The meeting was postponed by the President until after the conference of Allied leaders near Casablanca. In the meantime de Gaulle made overtures to Giraud looking toward a merger of the French empire in a single organization for the achievement of victory. He proposed that they meet on French soil to discuss the problem.[32] Giraud, although well disposed toward the idea, parried de Gaulle's proposal by asking him to wait until the military situation in French North Africa had become less demanding and political conditions less disturbed. Both men were invited to Casablanca by the Allies. Giraud accepted at once and arrived on 18 January. De Gaulle refused, then came there under some duress on 22 January.[33]

The basic contrast in their positions promptly became evident. The Fighting French were addicted to recrimination; they wished to sweep from office high officials who had accepted Marshal Pétain's authority, and they regarded as traitors those who had resisted or injured the Gaullists. Even Giraud was expected by de Gaulle to defend his patriotism. In contrast with such views, Giraud believed in rallying any kind of Frenchmen who could contribute to liberation, postponing accountability for earlier actions until France had been freed. It seemed likely that most of the French nation could be unified behind de Gaulle only at the cost of rigorous and even unfair measures against much of the population, while they could follow Giraud only at the risk of internal strife. It had already been shown that Giraud's personal capacity to aid the Allies was much less than Admiral Darlan's.[34]

As the two French leaders discussed a basis of unification at Casablanca, they indicated that it would be impossible for either to accept subordination to the other. Giraud at one time had had de Gaulle under his command in the French Army. He was by far the senior in age and grade. De Gaulle had been the first to rally the French against the Germans after other leaders had accepted military defeat, and while Giraud remained a prisoner. Each man led organizations combining civilian and military elements which exercised control over large parts of the French empire. The Fighting French held Syria, Equatorial Africa, French Somaliland, Madagascar, French

[32] (1) Msgs, USFOR to FREEDOM (de Gaulle to Giraud), 26 Dec 42, and replies, FREEDOM to USFOR (Eisenhower to Hartle and Giraud to de Gaulle), 27 and 29 Dec 42. ETOUSA Outgoing and Incoming Cables, Kansas City Reds Ctr. (2) COMNAVEU, U.S.-French Relations, 1942–1944, App. B, Pt. II, Item 41. OCMH.

[33] Giraud, *Un seul but: la victoire*, pp. 85–101.

[34] CCS 57th Mtg, 15 Jan 43, Item 2.



CASABLANCA CONFERENCE, *24 January 1943. From left, Gen. Henri Giraud, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Gen. Charles de Gaulle, and Prime Minister Winston Churchill.*

India, and insular territories (such as New Caledonia) in the Pacific. Giraud headed the High Commission governing the much more populous French North Africa and French West Africa. Neither organization was accepted by the French admirals of squadrons harbored in Martinique and Alexandria, Egypt. Gaullist units were already fighting with the British Eighth Army in Libya, and more were crossing the Sahara to join Montgomery in southern Tunisia. Giraud's forces fighting the Axis troops in Tunisia were perhaps three times as large as de Gaulle's, and the men in training were even more numerous. Resistance organizations in metropolitan France were not yet unequivocally committed in the main to either leader. Each man had reason to know that his name was honored in France among patriots. Which should have accepted a secondary role?

If a single organization were created, its character could be expected to influence strongly the character of the postwar government of France. The two Allied governments refrained on this account from trying to prescribe a form of political settlement but left such arrangements to be determined by the French themselves. Yet patriotic Frenchmen everywhere for years had been

divided on political and economic issues, and the weakness arising from their divisions, so fatal in 1940, was still a factor with which to reckon. Giraud was known as a man of somewhat aristocratic, conservative views. De Gaulle's adherents represented many shades of political opinion and included a large segment with leftist principles. If it was true that all wished to unite in 1943 to throw the Nazis out of France, it was also true that none wished to see France free of the Germans only to be controlled by Frenchmen of objectionable political views. The union so desirable for military ends was gravely impeded by its political implications. Ultimately, Giraud and de Gaulle decided at Anfa to continue their separate ways, maintaining liaison through representatives in Algiers and London, and perhaps one day achieving the basis for unity. Giraud remained the French military leader accepted by the Anglo-American Allies in the Mediterranean area. De Gaulle continued in a parallel capacity for other areas where Anglo-American military operations required co-operation with the French.[35]

The outcome of their conversations was a serious misfortune for the Allies. A French Army to be strong not only had to be well armed but well disciplined. Political factionalism threatened discipline. The two major Allies could not permit themselves to fall completely into a situation in which each had its own protegé. If support was withheld from either French organization, Allied interests would suffer. The future promised a situation in which dual French leadership would persist, in which jockeying for position could be expected, and in which each Allied government might be tempted to play one side against the other, and thus threaten their own collaborative unity.

Rearming the French

The Allies, as already pointed out, promised Giraud, Mast, and other Frenchmen who had dared work for unopposed Allied landings in North Africa, that arms would be furnished to modernize a French Army and thus again enable the French to take the field against the Axis. Preliminary steps to this end had already been taken by the Allies in December. To expedite redemption of that promise Giraud sent representatives to Washington. Furthermore, at Casablanca, he sketched French capabilities to the Combined Chiefs of Staff and discussed the problems of meeting French armament requirements with Lt. Gen. Brehon B. Somervell, Commanding General, Services of Supply (later Army Service Forces), U.S. Army.[36]

Giraud, in a somewhat offhand manner, received from President Roosevelt on 24 January a signed "Agreement in Principle" to deliver the matériel required for three armored and eight infantry divisions, as well as 1,000 first-line airplanes.[37] French naval vessels were to be reconditioned in American shipyards. The franc in French North Africa was to be exchanged hence-

[35] (1) Telg, Gen Giraud to Fr Mission in Washington, 26 Jan 43, reprinted in Giraud, *Un seul but: la victorie,* pp. 355–56. (2) COMNAVEU, U.S.-French Relations, 1942–1944, App. B, Pt. II, p. 80ff. OCMH.

[36] (1) Giraud, *Un seul but: la victorie,* pp. 94–96, 100–101. (2) CCS 62nd Mtg, 19 Jan 43. (3) For a detailed exposition see Vigneras, *Rearming the French.*

[37] Résumé of the Agreements in Principle Resulting from the Anfa Conversations, 24 Jan 43, and supplied to WD by Col LeBel. Copy in WDCSA France Super-secret File. For manner of delivery, compare Giraud, *Un seul but: la victoire,* p. 112, with Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service,* pp. 558–59.

forth at the new and more favorable rate of fifty to the dollar.[38]

These agreements were supplemented by a redefinition of the Allied position concerning a government of France. France was declared to have no government. The promises of American aid in liberating the nation made during the negotiations between Mr. Robert Murphy and General Giraud prior to the landings of 8 November were confirmed. Giraud, as the French Commander in Chief, was recognized as rightfully acting for the French people to preserve all their interests—military, economic, financial, and moral.[39] To the extent that such a document signed by the President but not the Prime Minister could do so, the Allies had committed themselves henceforth to support General Giraud. These decisions, on the literal interpretation and swift execution of which Giraud placed great trust, greatly cheered him as he returned to Algiers.

President Roosevelt's acceptance in principle of the schedule of rearmament submitted by Giraud after his appearance before the Combined Chiefs of Staff soon produced a tangle of interrelated difficulties.[40] The President considered it a tentative agreement rather than a detailed contract. For him it apparently defined the maximum French hopes but left the United States free to "do the right thing" after weighing other demands upon American production. Token shipments, training and replacement matériel, and as much more as possible were sent. But the shipping situation grew troublesome in the extreme, and the program lagged seriously behind what Giraud considered vital for the maintenance of his prestige.

The French put into the Allied pool vessels totaling initially 165,000 ship tons and before the end of the war 420,000 tons.[41] They claimed a lien on enough of this French tonnage to meet civilian and French military requirements. Their claim to a separate right to tonnage was denied.[42] The Anglo-American Allies allotted 25,000 tons per convoy from the United States for the French armed services.[43] Anything in excess would be available only if the limit of forty-five ships per convoy could be increased to forty-eight. Eventually General Giraud had to include the Gaullist units in his eleven-division program. As they passed under his control, they ceased to receive equipment through British General Headquarters, Mideast, and like all other French forces drew equipment from AFHQ.[44]

General Eisenhower, in December 1942, established a Joint Rearmament Committee at AFHQ on which the French were represented. Since the assignment of shipping priorities involved tactical considerations, such assignment was determined in the theater. Contributions toward the needs outlined by General Mast prior to 8 November and revived by General Giraud at Anfa in January tended to grow as time passed but their estimates were never fully realized.[45]

[38] Msg, FREEDOM to AGWAR, 29 Jan 43, CM-IN 13770.

[39] Memo, 24 Jan 43, signed with that relating to military matters by the President. OPD Exec 1, Item 13.

[40] Vigneras, *Rearming the French.*

[41] Msg, Béthouart to Marshall, 7 Apr 43. OPD 400 France, Sec 1. H. H. Dunham, *The U.S. Army Transportation Corps and the Conquest of North Africa,* OCT HB Monograph 9, Jan 45, p. 118. OCT HB.

[42] Msg, AGWAR to FREEDOM, 3 Feb 43, CM-OUT 608.

[43] Msg, FREEDOM to AGWAR, 26 Jan 43, CM-IN 12711.

[44] CCS 104th Mtg, 31 Jul 43.

[45] Vigneras, *Rearming the French.*

CHAPTER XIX

The New Situation: Axis Reaction

Revision of Axis Plans

In January the Axis powers like the Allies were obliged to revise their operational objectives in Northwest Africa. Earlier Axis decisions, it will be remembered, were to maintain two armies there by reinforcing Rommel's command while establishing in Tunisia the *Fifth Panzer Army* of four or more divisions. General von Arnim assumed command of this army on 9 December with the prospect of an aggressive campaign before him. Rommel was authorized to retire from Marsa el Brega to Buerat el Hsun if necessary to avoid being cut off, but he was expected to hold at Buerat el Hsun indefinitely while his losses were made good and his army was restored as an instrument of offensive power. To the commanders in the field it soon became evident that such plans could not be carried out without reinforcements, a radical improvement in transportation, and the provision of more equipment and supplies.

General von Arnim within a week of assuming command of the *Fifth Panzer Army*, reported to *Commander-in-Chief, South*, that the current rate of supply was far below African requirements. He estimated the volume at 12,000 tons per month for his army and an equal amount for Rommel's. Since only half his army was then in Tunisia, shipping to transport the remainder must also be found. The opportunity to complete the building up of the *Fifth Panzer Army* and reach the 24,000-ton-per-month level of resupply for the two armies was expected to last only six to eight weeks longer, this being the period during which prevailing rains would prevent the Allies from renewing their attack.[1] Yet at the existing rate, the concentration of Axis forces scheduled to come under his command would take several months.

Rommel at the same time was facing a critical shortage of supply and therefore, on 17 December, the very day on which he had got his army into position at Buerat el Hsun, urgently renewed his recommendation of 30 November that he be authorized to pull back into Tunisia, only to have his proposal again rejected.[2]

When Hitler, to establish the foundations of further operations, called a conference with Italian representatives at his Rastenburg headquarters on 18–22 December, he was presented by Kesselring's headquarters with a survey of Allied capabilities and a plan for providing the North African bridgehead with supplies and equipment. Hitler then reaffirmed his position that North Africa must be held in order to check the increasing power of the Allies, and concluded also that it was an Italian theater which would remain under Italian command. He would send reinforcements into

[1] Msg, *Fifth Panzer Army* to *OB SOUTH*, 15 Dec 42 in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB Anlagen, Geh. u. Geh. Kdo. Sachen Band 1, 16.XI.42–12.I.43.*

[2] See pp. 322–23 above.

Tunisia, including some of his best troops, bringing the German strength there up to 130,000–140,000 men, and take measures that would insure air superiority over the line of communications from Italy. He painted an optimistic picture. But it was one which recognized the critical nature of the logistical contest.

Before the end of the year, a second factor which Hitler was bound to recognize forced adjustments in the Axis program for Northwest Africa. The battle for Stalingrad began absorbing the reserves at the disposal of OKW, taking away to an operation of the highest priority the German divisions with which Hitler might have redeemed his earlier promises to Mussolini. The only opportunity to gain the preponderance of force necessary for aggressive action in Tunisia seemed likely to take place during the few weeks intervening between the arrival of Rommel's army and that of the pursuing British Eighth Army. Mussolini therefore issued a directive, which Marshal Bastico delivered to Rommel on 31 December at Misurata, authorizing his conditional withdrawal into Tunisia. The *German–Italian Panzer Army* was to move to the Mareth Position south of Gabès in several stages and at a rate which would consume at least two months. This much time would be needed to develop the Mareth Position. It was stipulated that Rommel must have the approval of Marshal Bastico for the timing of each step in the withdrawal.This restraint was a precaution against the loss of Italian foot soldiers to motorized enveloping attacks. When Rommel protested that the duration and staging of his withdrawal would have to take account of Allied maneuver, *Comando Supremo*, with Hitler's concurrence, gave him freedom of action for six weeks, the length of time regarded as necessary for him to reach a position just east of Tripoli.[3]

On 2 January, Rommel began sending back part of his nonmotorized force from Buerat el Hsun. By mid-January the rest of Rommel's forces, less the *21st Panzer Division,* had been forced back to the Tarhuna-Homs position. The rate of retirement which was to have kept Tripoli in Axis possession until the middle of February was suddenly accelerated by a British maneuver which Rommel accepted as a genuine threat of envelopment at Tarhuna–Homs. On the night of 19–20 January, he ordered movement to start still farther west; this step began the last stage of retreat to the next defensible position, that in southern Tunisia.[4] Rommel sent his rear area commander to Sfax on 19 January to open a headquarters from which to regulate traffic southward through Gabès to the retreating army. The stage was therefore set in Tunisia for the union of the Axis forces.[5]

Since early January *Comando Supremo* had feared an Allied offensive from the Tébessa–Gafsa area intended to prevent the junction of the two Axis armies. Retaining all of the present bridgehead and keeping open the connection to Rommel's army was naturally the first preoccupation of the Axis. *OKW* therefore concurred in *Comando Supremo's* proposal to seize Gafsa to counter the Allied threat. To carry out this plan the depleted *21st Panzer Division* was ordered

[3] Mins of Conf between Rommel and Bastico, 31 Dec 42, 1215 hrs, at Misurata, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 6, Anlage 713/2.*

[4] Memo, Rommel, *Panzer Army Africa (Nr. 324/43)*, 22 Jan 43, Rpt Rommel to Cavallero for the Duce, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt*, File *A I–Afrika Berichte, Band 3, 16.I.–18.V.43.*

[5] MS # D-072, *Aus dem Arbeitsgebiet des Kommandanten des Rueckwaertigen Armeegebiets Nordafrika, Teil II* (Generalmajor Ernst Schnarrenberger). Based on personal diary.

to the Sfax area to be re-equipped and used to make the attack on Gafsa. Kesselring, more than ever anxious about the adequacy of the forces in his African theater, pointed out that the shifting of units from one of the armies to the other could not be regarded as reinforcement and requested two motorized divisions in addition to the units that had been promised him. Though he carried his views up to Hitler himself on 12 January, he could get nothing more than permission to send the *Hermann Goering Division* into Tunisia immediately.

While the seizure of Gafsa was being planned, the possibility of more far-reaching operations was kept in view. Preparations to wrest control of the Tébessa area from the Allied force by an attack through Gafsa and Sbeïtla were ordered, and the possibility of driving all the way to Bône and Constantine was contemplated. It was recognized that such ambitious operations would require at least three mobile divisions, one of which would have to come from Rommel's army, and that they would be possible only when the *Fifth Panzer* and *German-Italian Panzer Armies* had been combined and only as long as the improved Mareth Position could be counted on to protect the southern flank. The immediate decision, made in early February, was to break up the Allied concentrations at Sidi bou Zid and Gafsa.[6]

The Axis Logistical Problem

The enemy's capacity for offensive operations remained conditioned by the ability of the Axis to improve the logistical support of the forces defending the Tunisian bridgehead. The arrival of Rommel's *German-Italian Panzer Army* in southern Tunisia on the turn of January–February did nothing to reduce the problems facing the Axis command. On 12 January Kesselring discussed the supply situation with Hitler and his staff. The combined armies in Tunisia, it was now estimated, would need 60,000 tons of supply a month. The *Commander-in-Chief, South,* optimistically assured Hitler that with additional shipping, which was becoming available from ports in Southern France, these increased demands could be met. Kesselring had misgivings as to surface protection for the convoys but felt that the ports of Bizerte and Tunis could handle the flow.[7] Although abandonment of the line to Tripoli permitted a concentration of effort and a considerable reduction of mileage over the highways, to meet the new schedules the sea and air transportation systems would have to be revolutionized.

The flow of men and matériel from Europe to Tunisia ran through Italy and Sicily overseas to the ports and airfields at Bizerte and Tunis. Railroad and highway connections with these terminals permitted speedy distribution to depots at various points along the coastal plain. The shallow ports of Sousse and Sfax were used by smaller cargo craft, but most traffic to Tunisia passed through Bizerte and Tunis. The channels into the harbors of Tunis, Bizerte, and Sfax were partially blocked by wrecks. Power cranes at the piers of Bizerte, and to a lesser degree at Tunis were damaged by Allied bombers and had to be replaced by cranes shipped from Toulon, Marseille, and after the first shipment was sunk on the way, from Germany. Meanwhile unloading was slow and cumbersome.

[6] *OKW/WFSt, KTB,* 19 Jan 43.

[7] MS # C–065a (Greiner), 12 Jan 43.

The transport vessels were not fitted out with heavy-lift equipment, and were forced to use their own cargo gear and improvise as best they could. The labor in the ports was not wholly reliable. Arabs fled rather than risk being caught in air raids. For the same reason few of the Tunisian Italians promised to Nehring for stevedore service ever appeared. German labor troops and Hamburg stevedores were finally imported. The turn-around rate for ships in Tunisian ports, unloading at piers from one side only, was approximately one day per 1,500 metric tons, which meant that the larger vessels remained long enough to experience one or more raids.[8]

Transport to Tunisia by air had begun on 9 November 1942 and continued until 11 May 1943. At the peak of the operation, the daily flight consisted of an average of 200 Junkers-52 aircraft, which carried 1.8 metric tons of useful load, and 15 of the gigantic six-motored Messerschmidt 323 planes, which carried 10 tons of useful load. Since part of the Junkers-52 elements made two trips a day from Sicily to Tunisia, the average total each day in this maximum period reached 585 metric tons. The volume dropped rapidly in April, as a consequence of successful Allied countermeasures, sinking to a daily average of less than 190 tons. These totals were achieved only by revising the emergency improvisations of November and establishing a routine intended to continue for a prolonged period. In December, Generalleutnant Ulrich Buchholz became the Air Transport Commander in the Mediterranean (*Lufttransportfuehrer Mittelmeer—LTFM*) and instituted a system whereby planes were concentrated at relatively few airdromes, with dispersion to numerous airfields occurring only in temporary emergencies.[9]

For the long pull in the Tunisian campaign, the German air transport service was organized under a central headquarters at Rome. Wing staffs were located at Capodichino near Naples and Trapani, Sicily, with control officers at the Tunisian airports of Sidi Ahmed (Bizerte) and El Aouïna (Tunis), and at some of the fields in the Sicily–Calabria and Naples areas. One round trip from Naples and two from Sicily were made each day.[10] The first Sicilian flight came in before 0700 and the second, late in the afternoon. Formations of from 80 to 120 planes each (*Pulks*) skimmed over the water at elevations of about 150 feet as they headed for Tunisia. Detection by radar or other means of observation was thus minimized, while attacks from below, against which the transports were defenseless, were avoided. The formations from Naples were escorted by fighters from Trapani during the crossing of the Sicilian narrows and by others based in Africa during the period of landing, unloading, reloading, and return. When these flights arrived off the Golfe de Tunis, they separated into sections for Bizerte or Tunis—sections scheduled to arrive during the normal noon lunch period for the Allied air forces—a time when hostile interference was found to be relatively unlikely.

[8] (1) Opns Rpt, *Fifth Panzer Army, O Qu, Taetigkeitsbericht, Abt Qu 3–OQ Tunis, 15.XI.–31.XII.42.* (2) MS # D–067 (Deichmann). (3) MS # D–093, *Eisenbahn-, Schiffahrts- und Transportlage fuer Nachschub ueber Italien nach Afrika, Jan–Mai 43* (Generalmajor Conrad Seibt).

[9] MS # D–071, *Versorgung des erweiterten Brueckenkopfes Tunis durch Lufttransport in der Zeit vom 1.XII.42 bis 11.V.43* (Generalleutnant Ulrich Buchholz).

[10] The principal airfields were, in the Naples area, Capodichino, Pomigliano, and Capua, and in the Sicily–Calabria region, Trapani, Palermo, Reggio di Calabria, and Vibo Valentia.



GERMAN SIEBEL FERRY *used to transport supplies from Italy and Sicily.*

Experience showed the necessity for removing cargoes quickly and sending the planes off without avoidable delay.

The Northwest African Air Force eventually perfected the means of detecting and surprising *Pulks* approaching the African coast. German fighter escort was small and the speed was controlled by the slower planes, sometimes at a rate which rendered the heavy Messerschmidt 323's so unstable that the formations had to string out. But not until April did Allied depredations pass the point of bearable loss. Meanwhile, suspension of the railroad ferry service across the Strait of Messina, or breakdown in the movement of trains on the Italian peninsula, required temporary modifications.

For supply by sea, Axis forces in North Africa could initially draw on a shipping pool of Italian and German merchant vessels with a combined tonnage of approximately 150,000 tons. The fleet consisted mostly of small merchantmen which had been used on short passages in the Mediterranean. In November when conditions were still favorable, the Axis command was able to use 37 merchant ships. This tonnage was supplemented by employing 20 ferries (Naval ferries with 80 tons capacity and *Siebel* ferries with 40 tons capacity) and 14 submarines. By an agreement with Vichy France the Germans were able to utilize about 100,000 tons of French merchant shipping found suitable for providing transportation to North Africa. As a result of Allied bombings the capacity of Italian shipyards was so reduced that only a fifth of the tonnage theoretically available was actually operational at any one time. To an even larger extent Allied sinkings curtailed Axis tonnage. Out of 95 ships of all categories which made the passage to Africa in November, thirteen were sunk. In December, 26 ships were sunk and 9 damaged out of a total of 127.

The Italian Navy was unable to protect the lines of supply. The Luftwaffe's effort to provide air cover proved equally inadequate. When, late in December, thirteen destroyers were diverted from escort duty to transport-

ing 300 to 350 troops at a time in swift passages at intervals of about three days, the practice exposed the freighters to an accelerated rate of depletion. As losses at sea and in port continued to mount, the Axis stock of cargo vessels, oil tankers, and troop transports fell so low that frantic efforts were undertaken to ship everything on small ferries. In January the number of such craft rose to ninety, but it was estimated that to be sufficient the fleet of ferries would have to be more than quadrupled. An increasing number of small coastal vessels and barges, some culled from France's interior waterways, were requisitioned but their total capacity was insignificant. Even before the period when almost half of all shipments to Tunisia by sea were lost en route (during the month of April) it became gradually and painfully clear to the Axis Command that adequate sea transport was an unattainable goal. Resourceful ingenuity could not outstrip Allied power.

Despite staggering losses the Axis managed to ship to Northwest Africa a surprising amount of troops and supplies. During the period from November 1942 through January 1943, 81,222 Germans and 30,735 Italians, a total of 111,957 troops, arrived there. Supplies brought in by air and sea during the same period amounted to 100,594 tons.[11]

Axis Reorganization in January

The presence in Tunisia of both Axis armies required a major alteration of the Axis command structure. Hitler, when warned in early December that the Italians would probably seek to command the Axis forces in Tunisia, declared his determination to retain effective control in German hands. He believed that the Italians would acquiesce, in view of the preponderance of German forces on which offensive action would depend, and because the Germans would be supplying most of the matériel and the supplementary (French) vessels to transport it to Africa.[12] His expectation was not fulfilled. As a result of the conference at Rastenburg the Germans had to concede that the conduct of operations in Tunisia as in Libya would be the responsibility of *Comando Supremo*. *OB SOUTH* would become commander of all German forces in the central Mediterranean and, although relieved of responsibility for ground operations in the Balkans, would control German air forces in the entire Mediterranean. Close co-operation in Tunisia between the Axis partners, it was agreed, would be sought by attaching a German operations staff to *Comando Supremo* for the purpose. Hitler accepted this arrangement. He also agreed to meet Cavallero's proposal that when Rommel's army had retired to Tunisia, it would be redesignated the *First Italian Army,* and Rommel would be replaced by an Italian commander.[13]

The Italians and Germans agreed that the retreat of *Panzer Army Africa* into Tunisia would make necessary a superior authority in the field to co-ordinate the two armies. The German military authorities wanted this to be an army group (*Army Group Africa*) with a German commander,

[11] (1) See Appendix B. (2) Opns Rpt, *Fifth Panzer Army, O Qu, Taetigkeitsbericht, Abt Qu 3–OQ Tunis, 15.XI.–31.XII.42.* (3) Rpt, *Afrika Transporte, Nr. 1701/43,* 7 Feb 43, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt (II), Afrika–A II Kraefte, 1.I–28.V.43.* (4) *MS #* D–093 (Seibt).

[12] Fuehrer Conference Fragments, 1 Dec 42.

[13] (1) MS # C–065a (Greiner), 19 Dec 42. (2) *OKW/WFSt, KTB, 1.I.–31.III.43,* 2 Jan 43. (3) Cavallero, *Comando Supremo,* p. 428.

reporting to a German armed forces headquarters, commanded by Kesselring. Hitler rejected this plan as politically inopportune and decided that *Comando Supremo* should exercise direct command of both armies.[14]

The reorganization of command could not be fully carried out until Rommel had withdrawn into Tunisia. In the meantime, the first concrete result of the discussions and maneuvers for position that went on throughout December and January was Kesselring's reorganization of his headquarters at Frascati to carry out his new duties. During January, Kesselring reorganized his headquarters from an Air Force into an armed forces staff with operations, quartermaster, and transport sections. The first two had Army, Navy, and Air Force groups, and the last included sea, air, and administrative groups, with a general officer on special assignment as deputy transport officer.[15] A separate staff was formed to control the *Second Air Force.*

As for the Tunisian theater, Kesselring, in addition to being Commander-in-Chief of the German forces, was to convey to the supreme Italian command the views of the Fuehrer and of OKW on the conduct of operations in that theater. To implement this relationship Kesselring in late January, as previously agreed, installed the whole of his operations staff except one officer in *Comando Supremo.* This move further strained the relationship between the Germans and Italians and endangered Hitler's policy of mollifying the susceptibilities of his anxious Italian partners. Marshal Ambrosio, who replaced Cavallero as Chief of *Comando Supremo* on 2 February, protested to Kesselring against the size of this contingent which outnumbered the whole operations staff of *Comando Supremo,* but he had to be content with the assurance that German influence on operations in Tunisia would be confined to recommendations and requests.[16]

To summarize Kesselring's position, he now had under his command:

1. The *Second Air Force.*
2. The German Air Force General at Headquarters of the Italian Armed Forces.
3. The Commander of the German Naval Forces, Italy, under the restriction that basic operational directives would be issued by the Navy High Command.
4. The German General at Headquarters, Italian Armed Forces (*Comando Supremo*), under the restriction that, in his capacity as liaison officer between OKW and *Comando Supremo* and in his missions outside of the Central Mediterranean, he was subject to direct control of OKW.

The directives issued by Hitler on 28 January indicates the complexity of *OB SOUTH*'s responsibilities and powers. Kesselring was to have the following tasks:

1. Represent the Fuehrer's concepts of the conduct of operations in the Central Mediterranean in negotiations with the Duce and *Comando Supremo.*
2. Assure German influence on the unified command of the panzer armies in North Africa which are placed under *Comando Supremo's* control.
3. Within the range of these powers, be the superior officer of the German Commander in Chief of the central headquarters for the two armies in Tunisia.
4. Control German Air Force and Navy operations in the Central Mediterranean, in

[14] *OKW/WFSt, KTB, 1.I.–31.III.43,* 22 Jan 43.

[15] (1) *OKW/WFSt, KTB, 1.I.–31.III.43,* 5 Jan 43. (2) Directive, *Der Fuehrer, OKW/WFSt, Nr. 6620/43,* 5 Jan 43, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt "Tunis."*

[16] (1) MS # C-065 (Greiner) 16 Feb 43. (2) *OKW/WFSt, KTB 1.I–31.III.43,* 18 Feb 43.

conformity with directives from the Commanders-in-Chief of those services, as in the past.

5. Direct the entire system of supply to German troops in the Central Mediterranean through his Chief of Supply and Administration and the Armed Forces Transportation Section under his control.

6. Submit requests and recommendations on matters of organization, including those of *Comando Supremo,* to *OKW/WFSt* or the High Commands of the several services.

To carry out the agreements rearranging the system of command in the Tunisian theater, on 23 January Mussolini designated General Giovanni Messe to assume command of the new *First Italian Army* when its organization had been effected. On 26 January the *Fifth Panzer Army* was put under direct operational control of *Comando Supremo.* Until the activation of Headquarters, *Army Group Africa,* the conduct of operations in Tunisia was, initially, to be co-ordinated by von Arnim.[17]

Axis air strength in Tunsia was consolidated in a single tactical air headquarters, *Fliegerkorps Tunis,* under Brig. Gen. Hans Seidemann, with headquarters at La Fauconnerie, northwest of Sfax, and with subordinate headquarters at Tunis and Gabès. Seven principal airdromes from Bizerte to Kairouan, six near Gabès, and others at Mezzouna, Sfax, and La Fauconnerie were to be linked for maximum performance by the *53d* and *77th Fighter Wings.* The Luftwaffe had expended 201 aircrews and 340 aircraft out of a total of 877 in stopping the Allied advance toward Tunis but could expect a period of at least temporary preponderance in fighters and fighter-bombers in northern and central Tunisia.[18]

Rommel's relief, which he was informed on 26 January would be given him for reasons of health, was postponed for more than a month beyond the time when his army entered Tunisia in early February. This action, according to the Axis plan, was to have been the signal for transfer of command to an Italian. The plan was amended first on 22 January to defer Rommel's departure until the army was firmly established in the Mareth Position, and a second time on 18 February to enable Rommel to command certain offensive operations before retiring. The commander designate of the *First Italian Army,* General Messe, was meanwhile familiarizing himself with the duties of his new command, and the Italian leaders waited with some impatience for Rommel's departure.[19]

The Axis Forces—Strength and Disposition

The strength of the Axis forces in Tunisia rose during January until it reached a total of approximately 100,000, of which 74,000 were Germans, and 26,000 Italian troops.[20]

During the transition month of January the *Fifth Panzer Army* was responsible for the defense of the Tunisian front sector from the sea to the thirty-fourth parallel, the boundary with Rommel's forces. Early in

[17] (1) Directive, *OKW/WFSt/Op Nr. 66214,* 28 Jan 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB Anlagen, Anlage 945.* (2) *Ciano Diaries,* p. 574. (3) *Panzer Army Africa, KTB Anlagen, Anlage 943/3,* 26 Jan 43. (4) Rad, *OKW/WFSt (H), Nr. 66185, 25 Jan 43,* in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt "Tunis."*

[18] (1) MS # T–3 (Nehring *et al.*), Pt. 3. (2) *German Air Hist Branch (Abt 8),* "German Air Force Activities in the Mediterranean. Tactics and Lessons Learned, 1941–1943," 30 Oct 44.

[19] (1) Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass,* p. 338. (2) Rad, Bastico to Rommel, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB Anlagen, Anlage 943.* (3) *OKW/WFSt, KTB,* 22 Jan and 18 Feb 43.

[20] Rpts, 10 Dec 42, 1 Jan and 1 Feb 43, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt (II), A IV–Afrika–Transporte Allgemein, 10.XII.42–29.VII.43.*

February the boundary was shifted northward to run from a point on the coast ten miles northeast of Sfax through Mezzouna and Station de Sened to the Kbir river northwest of Gafsa. Initially *Fifth Panzer Army's* headquarters continued operating with minimum staff and without a German corps staff intervening until von Arnim organized the provisional *Headquarters, Korpsgruppe Fischer* on 4 January. One reason for the activation of this headquarters was the arrival, late in December, of elements of the *334th Infantry Division* (Colonel Friedrich Weber) which was inserted between *Division von Broich* in the north and the *10th Panzer Division* (reinforced by the *5th Parachute Regiment*) in the Medjerda Valley and as far south as Pont-du-Fahs.[21] The Italian *1st (Superga) Division* continued operating directly under *Fifth Panzer Army* in its sector which extended to Djebel Bou Dabouss (816). *Headquarters,* Italian *XXX Corps,* on 12 January, assumed command over the portion of the *Fifth Panzer Army* front south of the *Superga Division,* with *Group Benigni,* the *47th Grenadier Regiment* (Lt. Col. Buse), and *50th Special Brigade* (Gen. Giovanni Imperiali). The *190th Panzer Battalion* was held in reserve, to be committed only on von Arnim's orders.[22]

Rommel's German units when they arrived in southern Tunisia were down to about half strength. They had approximately one third of their full tank strength (129 tanks, of which less than half were operational), one third of their complement of armored personnel carriers, about one fourth of their antitank guns, and one sixth of their artillery strength. Wheeled transport was down to roughly one third. Only in the truck category was the picture somewhat brighter. Here the Germans had managed to preserve 60 per cent of their allotted total.

German forces brought back by Rommel consisted of the German *15th* and *21st Panzer, 90th* and *164th Light Africa Divisions,* supplemented by the *1st Luftwaffe Jaeger Brigade,* corps troops and reconnaissance units with a combat effective strength of almost 30,000. The Italian divisions were the *131st (Centauro) Armored, 16th (Pistoia), 80th (La Spezia), 101st (Trieste), 13th (Young Fascists) Divisions* and the *Saharan Group.* Italian troops numbered about 48,000.[23] Of these units Rommel was about to lose the *Centauro Division* (temporarily) as it moved to positions guarding the El Guettar defile, and the *21st Panzer Division* (on 20 January) when it passed to the direct control of *Fifth Panzer Army* to be rehabilitated in the area of Sfax and simultaneously serve as army reserve.[24]

None of these divisions was anywhere near full combat strength. *Kampfgruppen* continued to undertake operations adapted to the requirements of particular missions rather than by divisions or standard subdivisions of larger units. No new divisions could be sent to Tunisia after mid-January. Not even the normal process of replacement by allocating troops from replacement bat-

[21] Another reason was Kesselring's order of 2 January to capture Medjez el Bab. See p. 373 below.

[22] *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB, Bands 2, 4,* 12 Jan 43.

[23] (1) Tabulations, 1 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 8, Anlage 1031/9.* (2) Giovanni Messe, *La Ia Armata Italiana in Tunisia,* Ministero della Difesa, Stato Maggiore Esercito–Ufficio Storico (Rome, 1950), p. 27.

[24] *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Band 2,* 20 Jan 43. The main body of the panzer division crossed the Tunisian border on 20 January. The division left its tanks and most of its heavy weapons with Rommel.

talions to fill up depleted units could be carried out. Instead, it became a practice to fill out regiments by assigning to them *Tunis Field* and *Africa Replacement Battalions*, units numbering about 900 men each, with their full complement of officers and light weapons.

In the seven weeks which followed the suspension of the drive on Tunis, during which the operational objectives of the two coalitions were modified and their forces were reorganized for action in central Tunisia, the new situation in Tunisia had thus developed several significant aspects. The Allies had temporarily lost the advantage of numbers; they retained the advantage of position, although lacking enough forward, all-weather airfields. Neither adversary could be dislodged readily from existing positions, although the French were somewhat vulnerable because of their lack of antitank defenses. The stalemate before Tunis and the conditions of weather and terrain encouraged both sides to extend southward, and each to attempt balancing the other's build-up along the Eastern Dorsal. Both the British First Army and the *Fifth Panzer Army* anticipated early reinforcement by second armies from Tripolitania, and each prepared plans and reorganized commands in order to guarantee well co-ordinated operations when the four armies faced each other at various points along the very broad front. Each coalition struggled with logistical problems, recognizing that the degree of success in this effort would control future operations. The Allies in this period confidently adopted a course of action for the next major operation in the Mediterranean, that in Sicily, for which French North Africa was to be a base, and to which the Allied Force engaged in liberating Tunisia would contribute much of the means.

The tactical initiative in Tunisia, which the Axis forces had seized near Tebourba, remained with them throughout these transitional weeks except for minor offensives by elements of British First Army and a limited success by the French. The tactical operations of this transitional period are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER XX

Sparring Along the Eastern Dorsal

Fighting To Keep the Initiative

During the period of Allied strategic decisions, reorganization, and accumulation of force which characterized the transition from Operation TORCH to the Allied offensives in March, the Allied Force was sparring for advantage with the *Fifth Panzer Army*. Each side sought to improve its positions and to seize the initiative.

Allied operations from 27 December to 17 January were essentially for consolidation or improvement of local situations and to keep the enemy under pressure. This was particularly true of the northern zone, where another attempt by the 36th Brigade Group on 5–7 January to capture the enemy's Djefna position on the road between Djebel Abiod and Mateur, at the defile between Djebel Adjred (556) and Djebel Azag (396), although it came closer to success than the effort in the last week of November, again fell short of the objective. Farther south, the British 6th Armoured Division shifted to the Bou Arada area to keep opposite the *10th Panzer Division,* and tried unsuccessfully to drive enemy detachments from their advanced positions on hills east of the road between Bou Arada and Goubellat. On 11–13 January, two attempts to take the hills revealed how strongly the enemy had organized these positions, with interlocking bands of machine gun fire, and with mortars registered exactly on those targets in defilade from other weapons. Here, as at the Djefna position, the enemy's shelters were proof against highly accurate Allied artillery shelling, enabling him to put up a strong defense against infantry attacks and to prepare counterattacks quickly to retake positions briefly occupied by the British.[1]

The enemy's determination to hold these hills may well have been strengthened by his intention of shortly making an attack through the area as part of a projected operation called *OLIVENERNTE*. By this operation the enemy planned to outflank Medjez el Bab from both the north and the south. Elements of the *334th Division* would attack through the mountains to take Oued Zarga and thus cut the road from Medjez el Bab to Bédja. The *10th Panzer Division* was to capture Testour and Slourhia just below Medjez el Bab on the Medjerda river, and the *5th Parachute Regiment* to take Djebel Rihane (720) and guard the south flank along a blocking position due west of the djebel. Von Arnim ordered this operation and assigned it to *Corps Fischer* after receiving Kesselring's order of 2 January to capture Medjez el Bab. Execution was postponed for about two weeks by continued bad weather and the chronic shortage of artillery and transport. Meantime two limited French offensives, 27–30 December and 12–15 January, gained important positions in the Eastern Dorsal on

[1] Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

either side of Karachoum gap and Kairouan pass, defiles which lead from the Ousseltia valley onto the coastal plain and southeastward to Kairouan. (*Map 8*) Although German reinforcements, sent to bolster the lines of the Italian *1st (Superga) Division* in this sector, were able to check any tendency of the French to carry the attack beyond the mountains, von Arnim decided on 13 January to eliminate the developing threat to this part of the Tunisian bridgehead. Troops for such an operation, if the attack was to be timely, had to be drawn largely from the *334th Infantry* and *10th Panzer Divisions*, so that Operation *OLIVENERNTE* had to be abandoned.[2]

An offset to the French success northwest of Kairouan was the loss a few days earlier of Fondouk el Aouareb gap to a well coordinated attack by superior Axis forces. On 3 January, a preparatory air strike in two waves, a powerful artillery bombardment, and a determined tank and infantry assault overwhelmed the French defenders with the loss of more than 300 men and several guns. This assault was made by elements of the *47th Grenadier Regiment* (reinforced) and the *190th Panzer Battalion*. Allied air support was credited with knocking out ten enemy tanks in repeated attacks. The enemy gained a stronghold in the area of the Fondouk el Aouareb gap. The French sought to contain the Axis forces at the gap and to prepare for a counterattack with American armor in an effort to recover control of this key opening in the mountain barrier.[3]

Headquarters, II Corps, opened in Constantine during the first week of January and, as already noted, first prepared to direct Operation SATIN, for the seizure of Sfax.[4] The force under its command, as contemplated on 12 January, was to consist of the U.S. 1st Armored Division (Maj. Gen. Orlando Ward) with the 26th Combat Team (Col. Alexander N. Stark, Jr.) of the 1st Infantry Division attached, the 1st British Parachute Brigade (less one battalion) for an airborne mission, and the French Constantine Division, plus corps troops.[5] Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, passed to General Robinett's control with the return of General Oliver to the United States to take a divisional command. Combat Command B, after commitment under British 5 Corps, reverted to General Ward's control on 7 January and, beginning next day moved to Sbeïtla for participation in the impending French-American attack to regain Fondouk el Aouareb gap and perhaps for flank protection during Operation SATIN.

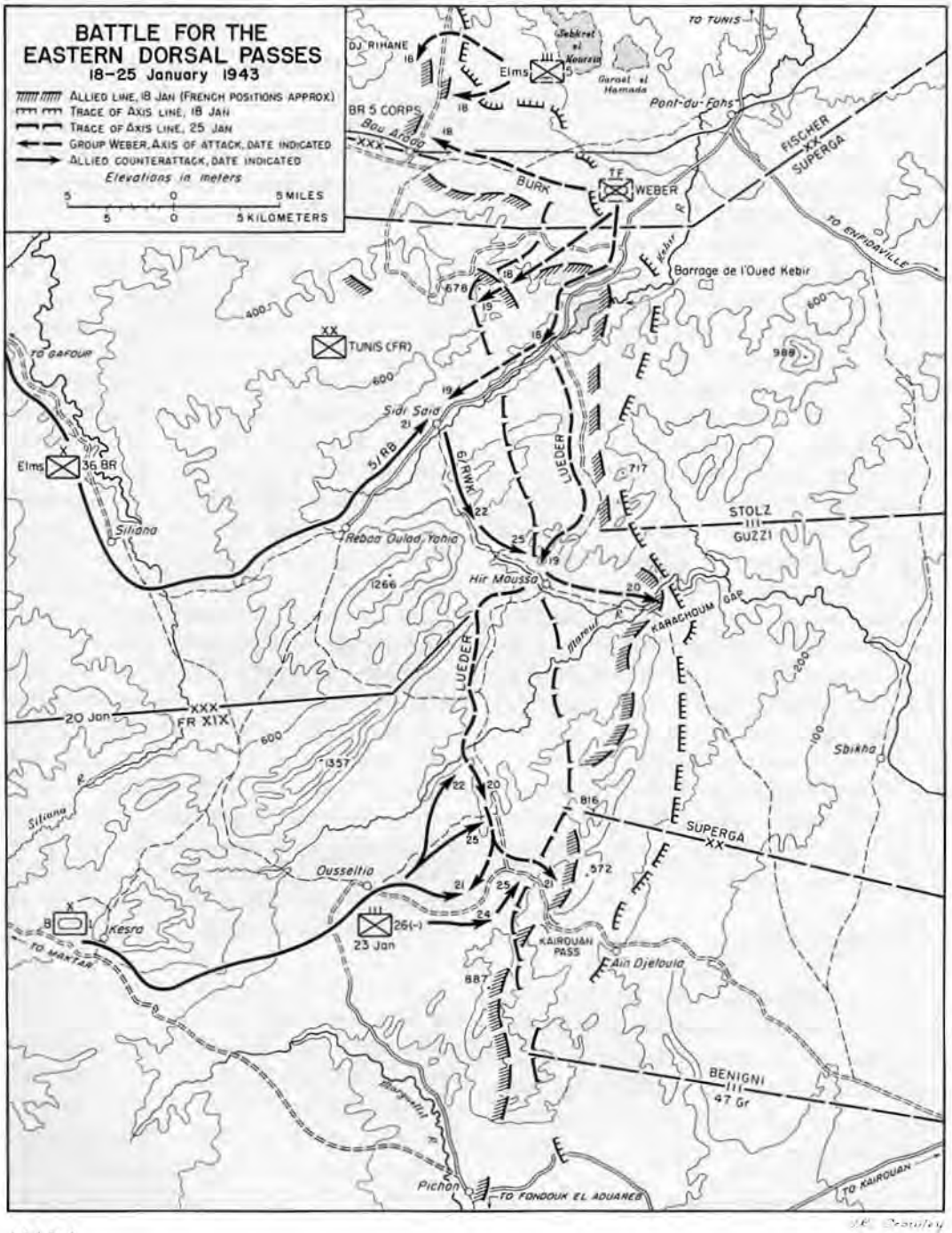
The remainder of General Ward's division came eastward from Oran to central Tunisia in early January, as did the 26th Combat Team (less its 3d Battalion, which had already come up near the end of November). Mobile antiaircraft protection for

[2] MS # T–3 (Nehring *et al.*), Pt. 3a.

[3] (1) Giraud Hq, Rapport des opérations, pp. 34–35. (2) Gen Mathenet, Rpt of 1st Moroccan Div Opns, 27–30 Dec 42, and Comments by Gen Jurion, Deputy Comdr CSTT, in CSTT Jnl, 30 Dec 42; see also same jnl, 26–30 Dec 42, 11–15 Jan 43. (3) XIX Corps Jnl, 6–15 Jan 43. (4) Journal de Marche de la Division de Marche d'Alger (hereafter cited as DMA Jnl), 7–15 Jan 43. (5) Phone Msg, XIX Corps to G–2 AFHQ, 1830, 3 Jan 43; Msg, Liaison Officer First Army to AFHQ, 4 Jan 43. AFHQ G–3 Ops 22/6, Micro Job 10A, Reel 5C. (6) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB III*, 3 Jan 43.

[4] General Fredendall's staff was headed by the following: Chief of Staff, Col. John A. Dabney; G–1, Lt. Col. Lon H. Smith; G–2, Col. B. A. Dickson; G–3, Col. Robert A. Hewitt; and G–4, Col. Robert W. Wilson. Other staff officers of Center Task Force had been reassigned to AFHQ, First Army, or the War Department.

[5] Msg, Eisenhower to CCS, 12 Jan 43.


BATTLE FOR THE
EASTERN DORSAL PASSES
18–25 January 1943
Allied line, 18 Jan (French positions approx.)
Trace of Axis line, 18 Jan
Trace of Axis line, 25 Jan
Group Weber, Axis of attack, date indicated
Allied counterattack, date indicated
Elevations in meters
5 0 5 MILES
5 0 5 KILOMETERS
TO TUNIS
DJ RIHANE
Sebkret el Kourzia
Garaet el Hamada
Pont-du-Fahs
Elms
BR 5 CORPS
Bou Arada
XXX
FISCHER
XX
SUPERGA
TF
WEBER
BURK
TO ENFIDAVILLE
Oued Kebir
Barrage de l'Oued Kebir
TUNIS (FR)
TO GAFOUR
Sidi Said
5/RB
Elms
36 BR
Siliana
B/RWK
LUEDER
STOLZ
GUZZI
Rebaa Oulad Yahia
Hir Moussa
KARACHOUM GAP
Marreu
20 Jan
XXX
FR XIX
Siliana
Sbikha
SUPERGA
XX
Ousseltia
Kesra
TO MAKTAR
23 Jan
26(-)
KAIROUAN PASS
Ain Djeloula
BENIGNI
47 Gr
Pichon
TO FONDOUK EL ADJAMES
TO KAIROUAN

MAP 8

the armored division was brought to Tunisia from Morocco in two sections: A provisional battalion under Maj. Werner L. Larson in January; and the remainder of the 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion (SP) under Lt. Col. John C. Smith in February. Although the multiple weapons on half-tracks, each mounting a 37-mm. gun and two air-cooled .50-caliber machine guns, could be used in an antitank role, it was possible only by placing the vehicles down a forward slope, or with their front wheels in a ditch. As antiaircraft weapons, they were destined to reduce the losses from enemy dive bombing appreciably.

Ten days' supplies of all types were accumulated at a new II Corps depot in Tébessa and at supply points extending eastward as far as Kasserine. A provisional ordnance group, assembled from northern Tunisia and Algeria, established its principal shops in Tébessa. An evacuation hospital and medical supply depot opened in Tébessa. Plans for an attack on Sfax via Gabès were being perfected by General Fredendall's staff at the very time when, as noted, the higher command felt obliged to cancel the undertaking and to direct II Corps to "act defensively." [6]

The Enemy's Attack, 18–28 January

As if to confirm the wisdom of the Allies decision to abandon an attack against Sfax, the enemy on 18 January began an operation to obtain control over Djebel Mansour (678) and over the main source of the water supply for Tunis—the great reservoir and dam on the Kebir river (Barrage de l'Oued Kebir) about twelve miles southwest of Pont-du-Fahs. Another purpose of his attack was to drive the French from the Eastern Dorsal near Kairouan between the reservoir and Kairouan pass.

Von Arnim, on 13 and 14 January, withdrew from *Corps Group Fischer* the *Headquarters, 334th Infantry Division* with the *756th Mountain* Regiment and two organic artillery batteries. From the *10th Panzer Division* he drew the *2d Battalion, 69th Panzer Grenadier Regiment,* the *10th Motorcycle Battalion,* and the *501st Heavy Panzer Battalion.* In addition, he earmarked for his attack (*EILBOTE I*) the entire north wing of the *1st* (*Superga*) *Division* (*Group Stolz*), and elements of the *190th Panzer Battalion,* and of the *20th Flak Division.* To support his main effort, and protect the exposed north flank of the attack, von Arnim ordered *10th Panzer Division* with elements of *5th Parachute Regiment* and armored *Kampfgruppe Burk* to execute a secondary drive in the direction of Bou Arada. He put Friedrich Weber in command. The force temporarily organized for the attack was known as *Kampfgruppe Weber.* Its movements were accomplished by using *Fifth Panzer Army* transport at night, with the intention of concealing the build-up.[7]

Colonel Weber organized his attacking force in three sections. The first consisted of the newly arrived *756th Mountain Regiment.* This was reinforced by two armored sections, consisting of four Mark VI (Tiger) and four Mark III tanks, and engineer, artillery, and antiaircraft elements. The

[6] (1) II Corps AAR, 2 May 43; 1st Armd Div G–3 Rpt 22; 26th Inf AAR. (2) Ltr, Lt Col Werner L. Larson to author, 27 Mar 51, with incl, Hist Rpt of 443d CA (AA) Bn (SP). (3) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[7] FO, *Fifth Panzer Army,* 14 Jan 43, in *334th Inf Div, Ia, Anlagen zum KTB Nr. 1, Unternehmen Eilbote I, 13.–25.I.43* (cited hereafter as *334th Inf Div, Ia, KTB Anlagen,* File *Eilbote I*).

force thus composed was sent to open the pass southeast of Pont-du-Fahs and to take Djebel Mansour. They were to support the movement of a second section, *Armored Group Lueder,* into the Ousseltia valley. This armored group consisted of one company of tanks, partly Mark VI Tigers and partly Mark IV's, and a battalion of armored infantry, with a platoon of engineers and some antiaircraft units. It was to push up the Kebir valley to the roadfork at the southwest end of the reservoir, then swing south for about twelve miles to Hir Moussa crossroads. After the mountain regiment had closed to the same area, *Armored Group Lueder* would turn east toward Karachoum gap. The third section of Weber's command was a composite German-Italian infantry regiment of the *1st (Superga) Division,* consisting of four battalions and reinforced by a company of *190 Panzer Battalion (Kampfgruppe Stolz).* It was to exploit by advancing to the west on an axis perpendicular to Weber's main effort and thus to complete the destruction of the French units on the Eastern Dorsal. Stolz would then build up a new line seven to nine miles farther west, extending from Djebel Mansour in the north to the heights just west of Hir Moussa. This would constitute the first phase of Operation *EILBOTE I.*[8] Finally, the operation might be extended southward to secure the better Kairouan–Ousseltia road which ran through the gap between Djebel Halfa (572) and Djebel Ousselat (887), connecting the the valley with the coastal plain at Aïn Djeloula.[9]

[8] FO, *Kampfgruppe Weber,* 17 Jan 43, in *334th Inf Div, Ia, KTB Anlagen,* File *Eilbote I.*

[9] (1) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB III,* 13–21 Jan 43. (2) AAR, *Kampfgruppe Weber,* in *334th Inf Div, Ia, KTB Anlagen,* File *Eilbote I.* (3) MS ♯ T–3 (Nehring *et al.*), Pt. 3a.

The attacks opened early in the morning of 18 January with diversionary thrusts by parachute infantry and tanks against the extreme south wing of British 5 Corps in the vicinity of the Bou Arada crossroads. Although the British parried these attacks successfully, fighting continued in this area intermittently during the following week without much change in position but with considerable losses on both sides. In the meantime the first section of Weber's force broke through the French and opened the way into the Kebir valley for the armored force. Lueder, after lending support to this operation, regrouped at 2100, then pushed ahead to his objective, the roadfork southwest of the reservoir, reaching it by midnight. *Kampfgruppe Stolz,* meanwhile, achieved what the enemy considered satisfactory progress in the subsidiary drive across the heights between the reservoir and Djebel Chirich (717).[10]

The enemy's intentions were still uncertain on 19 January, for although some of his armored forces were observed passing the northern edge of Djebel Bargou (1216) into the Ousseltia valley, a report by air reconnaissance of a movement from the reservoir area of an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 truck-borne troops made a dual thrust seem possible. By the end of the day the Axis forces had almost completed the first phase of their operation as planned. With a small but powerful force *Armored Group Lueder* blocked the road to Rebaa Oulad Yahia near Sidi Saïd. The main force had advanced to Hir Moussa crossroads. Col. Stolz's battalions had continued to move west and begun to relieve the *756th Mountain Regiment* on

[10] (1) *334th Inf Div, Ia, KTB Anlagen,* File *Eilbote I.* (2) AAR, *501st Heavy Panzer Bn,* in *Fifth Panzer Army, Anlagen zum KTB III A, 2.–31.1.43.*

Djebel Mansour thus freeing these units to follow Lueder. All along the front the French defenders were driven out. The remnants began to regroup northwest of Djebel Mansour and on Djebel Bargou. One group was isolated on the slopes of the Eastern Dorsal in the area of Karachoum gap. Neither Rebaa Oulad Yahia nor Ousseltia had more than miniature garrisons with meager antitank weapons manned by scanty British and American detachments. A small reinforcement of armored cars and engineers was sent forward by the British to Rebaa Oulad Yahia during the night. General Juin's appeal for Allied reinforcements, for commitment at a point to be determined after the enemy's hand had been more clearly shown, brought orders from AFHQ to the U.S. II Corps to divert a suitable force northward for the purpose.[11]

About 1715, 19 January, General Robinett, commanding Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, then in bivouac near Sbeïtla, was ordered by General Fredendall over the telephone:

> Move your command, i. e., the walking boys, pop guns, Baker's outfit and the outfit which is the reverse of Baker's outfit and the big fellows to M, which is due north of where you are now, as soon as possible. Have your boss report to the French gentleman whose name begins with J at a place which begins with D which is five grid squares to the left of M. Further, CC/B will enter Corps Command net not later than 0900 hours, 20 January. CC/B will remain in contact with SATIN Force at Tebessa.

The tanks, tank destroyers, infantry, and artillery, with engineer, medical, service, and maintenance companies, in all over 3,400 men, were on the road after dark and reached a point near Kesra before morning. The next day, the force received its mission.[12]

The situation on 20 January caused General Eisenhower's advance command post to arrange for co-ordinated resistance to the Axis attack by ground units of French, American, and British nationality, and by Allied air forces. The orders directed British First Army elements to move southeast and south toward the Rebaa Oulad Yahia valley to cut off and block the enemy's advance there, while Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, was placed at Juin's disposition for operations as a unit in either the Rebaa Oulad Yahia or Ousseltia valleys as the situation should require. The arrangement also specified that General Fredendall should assemble an armored mobile force comparable to Combat Command B in the Sheïtla area, to be used under his command to join the French in an attack against Fondouk el Aouareb starting on 23 January.[13]

General Juin assigned Robinett's force to General Koeltz's XIX Corps for commitment in the Ousseltia valley, to which it was ordered to move during the night of 20–21 January. By 0933, next morning, the force

[11] (1) Giraud Hq, Rapport des opérations, pp. 35–37. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[12] (1) CCB 1st Armd Div AAR, 19–29 Jan 43, 12 Feb 43. (2) The components of Combat Command B on 19 January 1943 were: Headquarters Company, Reconnaissance Company, Service Company (less detachment), and 2d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment (mediums); 2d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry Regiment; 27th Field Artillery Battalion; 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion (less Company A); Company B, 16th Armored Engineer Battalion (C); Company N, 47th Medical Battalion; Battery D, 106th Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion; and Company C, Maintenance Battalion, 1st Armored Division.

[13] (1) Dir, Truscott to Anderson, Juin, and Fredendall, 1200, 20 Jan 43. AFHQ G-3 Ops 22/2, Micro Job 10A, Reel 5C. (2) II Corps AAR, 2 May 43. (3) Msg 6436, Algiers to Atlantic Base Section (SAL), 1752, 20 Jan 43, AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

was assembled about five miles southwest of Ousseltia and engaged in active reconnaissance, with the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion (less Company A) out ahead.[14]

The German and Italian forces, which had met in the northern part of the Ousseltia valley on 20 January after converging on it from the northwest and northeast, had already accomplished most of their mission before the American reinforcements under General Robinett arrived. They had an opportunity, too tempting to resist, to clear the eastern mountain chain completely as far as Djebel Ousselat southeast of Ousseltia village and to envelop French troops caught on the heights by pushing along the ridge as well as attacking northwestward from the coastal plain. Only a shortage of infantry prevented them from mopping up the whole area and establishing themselves astride the passes. By midnight, 20–21 January, Lueder overran the three lightly held Allied roadblocks on the roads leading into Ousseltia village, and reached the Ousseltia–Kairouan road about four miles northwest of the Kairouan pass. During the night only one battalion of the *756th Mountain Regiment,* using trucks borrowed from other units, was able to reinforce Lueder. Nevertheless, the enemy could now block access to Kairouan pass from the west. He proceeded to destroy the French units, cut off on the ridge to the north of Djebel Bou Dabouss, assisted by Italian elements attacking from east of the pass.[15]

On the morning Robinett's command made its slow and difficult march from the Maktar area into the Ousseltia valley, an advance group of the British 36th Brigade, the 5th Battalion, Royal Buffs (5/RB), came up the valley of the Siliana river from Gafour to Rebaa Oulad Yahia before daylight and took up defensive positions north of the village. During the next night, 21–22 January, the British 36th Brigade, which had very recently been relieved after a long period in the line northeast of Bédja, shifted to Rebaa Oulad Yahia with the 6th Battalion, Royal West Kents (6/RWK), with part of the 12th Battalion, Royal Horse Artillery, and with detachments of engineers and light antiaircraft artillery. They took over the defense of the valley under attachment to the British 6th Armoured Division. The enemy's main effort had by then shifted to the Ousseltia valley.[16]

General Robinett received orders from General Koeltz at 1245, 21 January, to counterattack eastward along the Ousseltia–Kairouan road. He was determined not to fritter away strength by piecemeal commitment after an arduous march. His counterattack from Ousseltia toward the western entrance of the Kairouan pass began about 1500, after an air bombing and when strong artillery support was ready. It progressed steadily until nightfall against stiff resistance, but did not dislodge *Armored Group Lueder* from its blocking position along the road. At darkness, the enemy pulled back into a defensive perimeter. This allowed French troops, previously cut off on the heights near the pass, to slip southward and escape.[17]

At 1830, 21 January, XIX Corps put Robinett's command under the control of Gen. Agathon Deligne of the Algiers Divi-

[14] CCB 1st Armd Div AAR, 19–29 Jan 43, 12 Feb 43.

[15] *334th Inf Div, Ia, KTB Anlagen,* File *Eilbote I.* (2) XIX Corps Jnl, 19–21 Jan 43.

[16] Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[17] (1) DMA Jnl, pp. 20–21, 21 Jan 43. (2) 601st TD Bn AAR, 28 Feb 43. (3) Msg 138, Adv CP to AFHQ, 21 Jan 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 199. (4) XIX Corps Jnl, 21–22 Jan 43.

sion, units of which had been holding the pass under enemy attack. General Deligne at 0435, 22 January, in conformity with Allied plans, directed Robinett to abandon the counterattack, to adopt defensive measures toward the east, and to drive northward to a point of junction with British forces at the northeastern end of Djebel Bargou. Combat Command B's ammunition and supply train failed to get through during the night, so that a dawn attack could not be made. The enemy for his part was weakened by a breakdown of radio communications and by the fact that the direct road between Lueder's force and the *756th Mountain Regiment* was temporarily cut at Hir Moussa by fire from the 6th Battalion, Royal West Kents. The reinforced 2d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, began a thrust northeastward up the Ousseltia valley at 1430, 22 January only to be stopped soon by stiff resistance.[18]

Late that day, II Corps asked Robinett what reinforcements, if any, he would need to carry out the mission given him by General Deligne. In reply he gave his estimate of the forces opposing his command—one battalion of infantry, two companies of tanks, four 88-mm. guns, and three or four batteries of howitzers of at least 105-mm.—against which he had disposed one battalion of armored infantry, one battalion of thirty operational medium tanks, nine self-propelled and six towed 105-mm. howitzers, twelve 75-mm. tank destroyers, and a battery of 40-mm. antiaircraft weapons. The enemy had succeeded in placing his artillery on high ground along the eastern edge of the valley. Robinett therefore reported that any attack whatever northward over the floor of the valley would be unduly hazardous until infantry could engage the enemy in the eastern hills and prevent the flanking fire which might otherwise be expected. To clear the valley, he estimated necessary reinforcements as two battalions of infantry, one battalion of field artillery, and one company of tank destroyers, as well as indirect assistance from an anticipated strong push from the west into the valley by British units.

Elements of the 1st Infantry Division were already being sent from Guelma in Algeria via Maktar to the Ousseltia valley sector in order to take over part of the Allied line formerly held by the French, after Combat Command B should have restored the situation. General Fredendall expected, in the light of decisions taken at a command conference at AFHQ Advance Command Post on 21 January, that his zone was to be extended northward and that these troops would be controlled by II Corps. He expected to command them directly, and to have them operate under Col. D'Alary Fechet, regimental commander of the 16th Infantry, in co-ordination with Robinett's forces rather than under Robinett's command, while the latter was withdrawing. Fredendall instructed Robinett to discontinue his attack northward, the operation which General Deligne had ordered, and instead to hold Combat Command B near Ousseltia village on the defensive. Robinett's command was still attached to French XIX Corps and under orders by General Deligne to carry out the offensive, orders he was unable to execute without the reinforcements which, upon arrival would be operating, as just stated, only in co-ordination with Combat Comand B, rather than under attachment to it. While Lt. Col. Russell F.

[18] (1) *334th Inf Div, Ia, KTB Anlagen*, File *Eilbote I.* (2) CCB 1st Armd Div AAR, 19–29 Jan 43, 12 Feb 43; Chronological Sequence of Events in the Ousseltia Valley Campaign, 10 Feb 43, in 1st Armd Div Hist Rcds, Vol II.

Akers, Jr., an Assistant G–3 of II Corps, attempted to straighten out this tangle, Robinett's force held its positions.

As the night of 22–23 January passed, persistent efforts to get Allied aviation to furnish a controlled air support mission next day finally proved successful. The request was approved about 1000, 23 January, for execution at 1230. When the planes arrived, one smoke shell was placed on the target, which then came under accurate bombing. Damage included the destruction of two enemy trucks loaded with ammunition. During the bombing and a subsequent artillery shelling, a truckload of American prisoners of war was able to scatter, and later to infiltrate back to their own lines after darkness. But with its mission and command relations uncertain, Combat Command B lost the opportunity to follow up with an attack to seize the area.

The first elements of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division began arriving before the end of the day, too late to organize an attack for 24 January. They were attached by II Corps to Combat Command B. The principal unit for commitment toward Kairouan pass was the 26th Infantry Combat Team (less 3d Battalion) commanded by Colonel Stark, which included the 33d Field Artillery Battalion. The 7th Field Artillery Battalion also supported an attack begun by Colonel Stark's force at 0900, 25 January. By that time, Weber's force started its withdrawal, leaving the newly established main line of resistance across the northern end of the Ousseltia valley and along the eastern edge to Djebel Ousselat to be defended by an Italian force consisting of elements of the *1st (Superga) Division* and *Group Benigni.* Stark's attack first encountered about noon a battalion of Italian infantry which had been recruited in Tunisia, drove it back, and continued advancing through the following night. By the next morning, it had gained the western end of the Ousseltia–Kairouan pass and had come up against a German unit. Its offensive continued during the next two days.

Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, after assisting these infantry operations to a successful outcome at the pass, and after more uncertainty about its mission, received orders from General Koeltz in person to move north on 27 January to clear the enemy from the valley. At 1530, this attack began, and moved smoothly along the western edge of the valley at the base of Djebel Serdj (1357). During the following night, the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, and 7th Field Artillery Battalion moved under armored escort to the northern end of Djebel Serdj. The enemy had stepped up his air attacks in the valley beginning on 25 January, but the Allied hold on the southern and western portions was not otherwise contested, and Stark's progress at the pass promised eventual control not only over its western exit but along its entire length. Combat Command B and the 26th Combat Team (less 2d and 3d Battalions) were needed elsewhere, however, so that both were withdrawn from the valley during the night of 28–29 January. While Robinett's force made a long road march to Bou Chebka, Stark's shifted to the vicinity of Sbeïtla, where it joined Combat Command A, 1st Armored Division.[19]

Before these two forces left, the U.S. 1st Infantry Division (General Allen) with

[19] (1) CCB, 1st Armd Div AAR, 19–29 Jan 43; Chronological Sequence of Events in Ousseltia Valley Campaign, 10 Feb 43, in 1st Armd Div, Hist Rcds, Vol. II. (2) XIX Corps, Jnl, 23–27 Jan 43. (3) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (4) 601st TD Bn AAR, 28 Feb 43; 26th Inf AAR, 25–28 Jan 43, 23 Apr 43.

headquarters in Maktar temporarily assumed defense of the Allied line running along the Ousseltia valley and southeast toward Pichon. Colonel Fechet's 16th Combat Team was to be on the north and Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.'s, mixed command of American and French units, on the south. The French units were to be relieved as rapidly as possible by the 18th Combat Team (Colonel Greer) and a combat team from the U.S. 34th Infantry Division. Eventually the 34th Division was expected to relieve all 1st Infantry Division units and thus permit their consolidation in British First Army reserve. It was during an early stage in these preparations that Combat Command B and 26th Combat Team (less 2d and 3d Battalions) returned to II Corps control from that of General Koeltz. Their battle in the Ousseltia valley was ended. Robinett's command had lost 5 killed, 54 wounded, and 25 missing, had captured 11 Germans and 28 Italians, and had killed an estimated 205 of the enemy. It claimed to have destroyed six Mark III and three Mark IV tanks, eight 88-mm. guns, one mortar, four 20-mm. guns, and two enemy aircraft. The 26th Infantry (less 3d Battalion) had lost 7 killed, 47 wounded, and 64 missing, while taking 211 prisoners.[20]

The enemy had dealt a hard blow, especially to the French, one battalion being reduced to only 196 men. His prisoners totaled 3,449. Material captured or destroyed, as reported, included 87 machine guns, 16 antitank guns, 36 artillery pieces, 21 tanks, 4 armored reconnaissance cars, 4 self-propelled gun carriages, more than 200 other vehicles, and over 300 horses. Allied aviation and artillery had inflicted considerable damage on the enemy, but control of the passes west of Kairouan was worth this price to the *Fifth Panzer Army*.[21]

At the tactical level, the battle in the Ousseltia valley yielded some valuable lessons to the Allies. The enemy was discovered to have an unexpectedly defensive attitude, for he twice abandoned strongly held positions under cover of darkness without waiting for the Americans to press their attack home, leaving at least ten mobile artillery pieces. The morale of the Italian troops was found to be low; among the prisoners taken were a conscripted Pole, a Yugoslav, and several Austrians. Among the probable causes for this low morale was a failure of supply, many units going without rations for a long period. Another probable cause was the fact that Axis air support was not as strong or as co-ordinated with ground operations as it had been near Tebourba, while at the same time the Allied air effort was noticeably greater.[22] By standing up to the attacking force and refraining from a premature attack or ill-advised armored lunges, Combat Command B had been able to avoid enemy traps and to retain its ability to strike back at a favorable time. Because of the termination of its commitment, and that of Colonel Stark's Combat Team on 28 January, Combat Command B lost the opportunity of regaining the passes through the Eastern Dorsal before the enemy could become solidly established astride them. The French had fought ably, but they were handicapped by the lack of heavy weapons and means of communication. From now on it

[20] (1) Msg N22/29, Adv CP AFHQ to AFHQ, 30 Jan 43, AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 272. (2) Ltr, Gen Allen to CinC AF, 7 Feb 43. AFHQ G–3 Ops 22/2, Micro Job 10A, Reel 5C. (3) 3d Bn 16th Inf Battle Rpt, 8 Mar 43; CCB 1st Armd Div AAR, 19–29 Jan 43, 12 Feb 43. (4) XIX Corps Jul, 24 Jan 43.

[21] *334th Inf Div, Ia, KTB Anlagen*, File *Eilbote I.*

[22] CCB 1st Armd Div Intell Rpt, 21–28 Jan 43.

would be necessary to reinforce their sector with U.S. and British units until their equipment could be brought up to modern standards.

Changes in Allied Field Command

The enemy's attack from Pont-du-Fahs to Ousseltia in the week following 18 January had far-reaching consequences. It did not, as was once supposed, cause the cancellation of Operation SATIN, for as already pointed out, that decision had been made by General Eisenhower at Casablanca.[23] But it did bring an end, after less than four weeks, to the period of national commands by the British First Army, American II Corps, and French XIX Corps, each directly under General Eisenhower.

The enemy's attack had been well aimed. Striking first between British 5 Corps and the French, it forced the two Allied forces to attempt the difficult task of co-ordination across their boundaries and, as just shown, even involved American II Corps in remedial measures. General Eisenhower discovered that to control the entire Allied line through his advanced command post would not be practicable. On 21 January he flew with General Spaatz and Brig. Gen. Lauence S. Kuter to Constantine, met Generals Anderson, Fredendall, Truscott, Cannon, and Juin, and transferred to Anderson responsibility for co-ordinating operations in the three national sectors. General Juin accepted the new situation and General Giraud made no objection.[24]

Unified air support along the broad Tunisian front had proved to be as essential as a single command over the ground forces. During the early part of January, the XII Air Support Command had declined requests to send units over the area for which Royal Air Force 242d Group held responsibility. The impending operations by II Corps required that its resources for air support be carefully husbanded. In close sequence, Operation SATIN was canceled; Brig. Gen. Howard A. Craig, commanding XII Air Support Command, became ill and was relieved by Col. Paul L. Williams; American air support was furnished over the Ousseltia valley to stranded troops on the heights and to Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division; and General Kuter was installed in command of an Allied air support command, charged with controlling



LT. GEN. K. A. N. ANDERSON
leaving the command post of Gen. Louis Koeltz, Tunisia.

[23] II Corps AAR, 3 May 43.

[24] (1) CinC AF Diary, 21 Jan 43. (2) Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, p. 127. (3) Msg 6436, AFHQ to Atlantic Base Section (SAL), 1752, 20 Jan 43, AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

Allied operations until the Northwest African Tactical Air Force under Air Vice-Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham should come into being.[25]

It became clear after about four days more that simple co-ordination of forces was insufficient; the situation required command. General Anderson could not maintain the pace which had already taken him over more than 1,000 miles of Tunisian roads in order to confer with independent commanders and guide them toward decisions conforming to a general plan of action. When Generals Eisenhower and Anderson met at Télergma airfield, southwest of Constantine, on 24 January, the next step toward improvement of the command situation had to be taken. The same motives which had induced the commander in chief to transfer Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, from SATIN Force to French XIX Corps on 20 January now caused him, four days later, to make Anderson "responsible for the employment of American troops" in accordance with general directions from AFHQ. The II Corps was attached to First Army. General Juin was urged to take parallel action for French troops, whose sector was to be narrowed materially. Following a long conference with General Anderson that evening, General Juin yielded, effective 3 February, acting in this vital matter on his own responsibility since General Giraud was attending the conference at Casablanca.[26]

General Eisenhower's directive to General Anderson followed at once:

The object of your current operations must be:

a. To re-establish your central forces on the general line: FONDOUK [el Aouareb]—eastern exit of the pass east of OUSSELTIA—the terrain feature DJ BOU DABOUSS (0–85)—road junction 7 miles northeast of ROBAA [Rebaa Oulad Yahia]–BOU ARADA.

b. As soon as you have accomplished *a*, to seize and hold the eastern exits of the passes along the general line: EL GUETTAR–MAKNASSY–FAID–FONDOUK.

c. To protect your right (south) flank with particular attention to the air bases in the TEBESSA area. In this connection, I deem it essential that you keep the bulk of the 1st Armored Division well concentrated, so as to be prepared to take advantage of any opportunity the enemy may offer to act aggressively as well as to counter strongly any enemy thrust that may develop.

The command arrangements arrived at by you in conferences with General Juin to meet the situation resulting from the enemy breakthrough in the area of the DORSALE ridge are confirmed. Under these arrangements you are given command of all Allied forces on the TUNISIAN front, including, in addition to the troops presently assigned to the First Army, the II Corps (U.S.), and a Composite Corps (French and U.S.). The Composite Corps will consist ultimately of the 34th Division (less detachments) and certain French elements now in the OUSSELTIA area, all under a French corps commander.

I know that you will be fully sympathetic with the efforts of General Juin to conserve the French forces and uphold the honor of France, and that you will always welcome him at your headquarters and at the front, and afford him every facility which will contribute to that end.

The regroupment of your forces incident to the above will envisage the relief of all elements of the 1st Division (U.S.) and their movement to an assembly area in the vicinity of GUELMA, where it will later pass to your control prior to the attack. To this end, it is contemplated that the 168th CT (U.S.) will be made available to you for the relief of the 26th RCT (U.S.).

[25] Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[26] (1) Despatch, Lt Gen K. A. N. Anderson, p. 8. OCMH. (2) Memo, Deputy CofS AFHQ (Truscott), for CC's of First Army, II Corps, and 1st Inf Div, 24 Jan 43, sub: Attachment of Amer troops to Br. First Army. AFHQ Micro Job 10A, Reel 5C.

You are to bear in mind always that all operations now to be undertaken are for the purpose of facilitating the launching of a powerful coordinated attack as soon as the weather will permit and the necessary forces and supplies can be assembled in position. In this latter interest we must look well to the security of lines of communication and to increasing by every possible means the daily delivery of supplies in the forward area.

For your information, the Allied Air Force is being directed to continue to pound Rommel's line of retreat including his critical ports so as to hamper to the utmost his withdrawal.

General Giraud has been shown this directive and has concurred in it.[27]

The AFHQ orders of 20 January prescribing the transfer to French command of Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division (see page 378 above), had also contained instructions to General Fredendall to assemble in the Sbeïtla area an armored force of comparable strength. But a French attack in the Pichon–Fondouk el Aouareb sector starting 23 January, which this U.S. armored unit was to have reinforced, had to be abandoned.[28]

After II Corps had been attached to it, First Army directed General Fredendall to assume command of the ground troops of all three nationalities operating south of a line running through Morsott–Thala–Sbiba (all exclusive), Djebel Trozza (997)–Fondouk el Aouareb (all inclusive), and north of a line from the salt marshes to Gabès.[29] (*See Map V.*) The mission of II Corps was limited to protecting the right flank of the Allied forces in Tunisia. The French were to be largely withdrawn for rest and rearming, and prepared for the new command arrangements to become effective on 3 February.[30]

The decision to withdraw the majority of the French forces from forward areas required a modification of the mission assigned to General Anderson in the commander in chief's directive of 26 January. As altered, it was:

a. To protect the airfields at SOUK EL KHEMIS, TEBESSA, and THELEPTE . . . so that our air forces may operate continuously from them; and to secure the defiles at MEDJEZ EL BAB and BOU ARADA which First Army will require when, in conjunction with Eighth Army, the offensive against the enemy in Tunisia begins.

b. Without prejudice to the role in *a* above:

(1) to secure the defiles at present held by the enemy which will improve our position when the offensive begins.

(2) to interfere with the enemy's lines of communication in the coastal plain.

In undertaking minor offensive operations, you are to consider the effect upon morale of costly failures. Sufficient means should be assembled to give reasonable assurances of success.

The revised directive continued with the following admonition:

In the execution of the above mission, I deem it essential that your mobile striking forces in the south be held well concentrated so as to strike en masse when the need arises.

I realize that it will not be possible for you

[27] Ltr, Eisenhower to Anderson, 26 Jan 43, AFHQ G–3 Ops 58/2.1, Micro Job 10C, Reel 188D. (Italics supplied by author.)

[28] II Corps AAR, 2 May 43.

[29] (1) First Army Opns Instruc 11, 26 Jan 43. DRB AGO. (2) Fredendall and Juin agreed that Fondouk el Aouareb should be within II Corps' area in a conference at Tébessa on 27 January 1943, reported via AFCP to AFHQ and First Army in Msg 94/27, 28 Jan 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, p. 257.

[30] (1) Giraud Hq, Rapport des opérations, p. 39. (2) First Army Opns Instruc 11, 26 Jan 43. DRB AGO.

to withdraw the 1st Division (U.S.) into reserve in the vicinity of GUELMA.[31]

If the dispersion of the 1st Armored Division did not disturb the commander in chief because of its adverse effect on Operation SATIN, it was objectionable because of the fundamental need of covering the south flank. He wished the division concentrated as soon as possible, and repeatedly made his desires known to General Anderson.[32]

The Enemy's Next Moves

In the struggle for the advantages of position and initiative prior to 29 January 1943, the enemy had gained the larger measure of success. In northern Tunisia, he retained his positions guarding the routes to Bizerte and Tunis. Farther south, he controlled all the important passes giving access to the coastal plain in the vicinity of Kairouan. His thrust from the north into the Ousseltia valley had forestalled an Allied operation to recover the gap at Fondouk el Aouareb. To protect the line of communications along the coast from Tunis toward Tripoli, which had just become the only source of supplies for Rommel's army approaching the Mareth Position, the enemy next planned to take control of the routes by which the Allies in central Tunisia could attempt a disrupting attack and subsequently destroy the American forces in the Tébessa area. To facilitate this task *Comando Supremo* on 28 January ordered the *Fifth Panzer Army* to take offensive action at three points—the Rebaa Oulad Yahia valley, the pass through the Eastern Dorsal at Faïd, and the road center and oasis of Gafsa.[33] Preparations for an attack at Faïd pass were already far advanced.

II Corps Plans

Ten days earlier U.S. II Corps had devised its own program in the light of its new directive to act defensively. If an active defense like that of the enemy was not authorized, the problem for II Corps was to determine what ground it needed to hold in order to protect the southern flank of British First Army. The main corps supply base at Tébessa and a growing airbase at Thélepte were the only installations of consequence in the corps area which required protection. Everything else existed for the purpose of supporting Allied forces holding Faïd pass and Gafsa, on the one hand, and covering the pass at Fondouk el Aouareb on the other. Mere possession of a pass by one side offered a threat to the other. The French were convinced that both Faïd pass and the oasis of Gafsa should be defended strongly. The II Corps could employ elements of the 1st Armored Division (reinforced) to strengthen the garrisons at those two points, or it might attempt to take Fondouk el Aouareb, Maknassy, or other places from the enemy, or it might hold the division well concentrated and in readiness to fend off any hostile intrusion and to threaten retaliatory action. The last course, although

[31] (1) Ltr, Eisenhower to Anderson, 11 Feb 43. AFHQ C–3 Ops 58/2.1, Micro Job 10C, Reel 188D. (2) In addition to Combat Team 18 (strength approximately 4,500), First Army had under command 62,456 British officers and enlisted men on 27 January 1943. Q (Maint) Tab Rpt of Admin Sitrep 10, 1800, 27 Jan 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

[32] Memo, Brig J. F. M. Whiteley for Gen Rooks, 22 Jan 43; Memo, Rooks to Whiteley, 22 Jan 43; Ltr, CinC AF to CG First Army, 26 Jan 43; Mins of Conf, 1 Feb 43. AFHQ G–3 Ops 58/2.1, Micro Job 10C, Reel 188D.

[33] Msg, Cavallero, *Comando Supremo* (*Nr. 027/OP/A*) to *Fifth Panzer Army*, 1830, 28 Jan 43, in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB, Anlagen, g. Kdos. (Chefsachen), 16.I.–26.II.43, Tunesien.*

specifically ordered by General Eisenhower, was postponed until after all elements of the 1st Armored Division had had a taste of combat.

General Fredendall's first plan of action preceded the summons to send Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, to the support of French XIX Corps in the Ousseltia valley. It provided for four simultaneous assaults against different objectives, to begin on 22 January. One attack would be launched from the vicinity of Hadjeb el Aïoun, in conjunction with General Koeltz's command, to recapture Fondouk el Aouareb from the enemy. The other three operations were all to be based in the Gafsa area, about 100 miles airline from Fondouk el Aouareb, and to be directed against Maknassy, El Guettar defile, and Bir Mrabott, respectively.[34] Mountains and substantial distances would separate each of the three forces engaged in these operations. The overly ambitious project was suspended when Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, shifted to Maktar en route to Ousseltia.[35]

The attacks on El Guettar defile and Bir Mrabott were dropped but Combat Command A, 1st Armored Division (Brig. Gen. Raymond E. McQuillin), was sent to Sbeïtla to take over the mission which Combat Command B had been fulfilling there, while the seizure of Maknassy remained on the agenda for early execution. To carry out that attack, General Ward improvised a Combat Command C, 1st Armored Division, under control of a headquarters consisting chiefly of the staff of the 6th Armored Infantry Regiment (Col. Robert I. Stack). Before sending this force against Maknassy, and despite the objection of Generals Ward and Welvert that the prospective attack there would thus be revealed, General Fredendall sent elements of Combat Command C in a hit-and-run raid on Station de Sened. It occurred on the night of 24–25 January 1943.[36]

The raiding force, protected by Allied air cover, left Gafsa at about 0400, 24 January. Company C, 81st Reconnaissance Battalion, took up a position east of Station de Sened from which it could stop any reinforcements coming from Maknassy. Battery B, 68th Field Artillery Battalion, opened fire about 1115 from positions west of the objective. At noon, Company I, 6th Armored Infantry, with one mortar platoon jabbed from the west while the tanks of Company I, 13th Armored Regiment, and the remaining infantry swung around the right flank and struck Station de Sened from the south. The tanks overran some antitank guns at the southern edge and continued among the few houses and the olive trees, while infantry followed mopping up. In a little more than three hours from the opening artillery concentration to the last, the place had been overwhelmed and Combat Command C could reorganize for the return march. By 1800, it was back in bivouac near Gafsa. Two men wounded, one tank damaged by a mine and another by gunfire, were the

[34] Bir Mrabott is about 20 miles southeast of Gafsa on the Gabès road.

[35] II Corps FO 1, 19 Jan 43. (2) II Corps AAR, 3 May 43.

[36] Combat Command C for this engagement consisted of: the 6th Armored Infantry (less the 1st and 2d Battalions and Company G); Company C (plus one platoon of Company D), 81st Reconnaissance Battalion; Company I, 13th Armored Regiment; Battery B, 68th Field Artillery Battalion; the 3d Platoon of Company D, 16th Engineer Battalion; the 2d Platoon of Battery B, 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion (SP); and detachments of the 141st Signal Company and 47th Medical Battalion. See 1st Armd Div Opns Instruc 1, 23 Jan 43.

only American casualties. Prisoners totaled ninety-six, with the killed and wounded estimated to be about the same number. For the American troops, it had been principally a morale-building exercise. They were better prepared for the next operation. For the enemy, it was a distraction, luring reinforcements to Station de Sened and drawing increasing air activity toward the Gafsa area.[37]

General Fredendall faced an immediate choice between occupying Maknassy and the pass just east of it or strengthening the Allied hold on Faïd pass, as General Giraud and General Juin desired. Either operation would be undertaken in the face of known enemy preparations for an offensive toward Tébessa or Gafsa. The 1st Armored Division had been considering operations against Maknassy since early January. Fredendall's decision was to seize Maknassy, on the ground that such action would effectively protect Faïd pass and would inflict direct damage on the enemy.[38]

Maknassy, it will be recalled, is in the southeastern corner of central Tunisia on a plain where the Eastern Dorsal bends to the southwest toward Gafsa. The fertile, irrigated olive orchards close to the village are in turn surrounded by undulating stretches of bunch grass and cactus which stretch not only to steep hills on the east and south but to a screening arch of hills and ridges on the west and north, a barrier which projects from the Eastern Dorsal. A narrow-gauge railroad and highway enter the Maknassy plain at the southwestern corner through an opening at Station de Sened and continue east through a defile between low hills. Entry from the north is made via a pass between Djebel Maïzila (522) and Djebel Gouleb (736) through which runs a road from Sidi Bou Zid. (*Map 9*)

The plan for the attack on Maknassy would send two forces against the objective in simultaneous assaults, one approaching from the direction of Maïzila pass and the other by way of Station de Sened. At the same time, in reserve, a third element of the 1st Armored Division would be near Sbeïtla. For the Maknassy attack, scheduled for 1 February, Colonel Stack's Combat Command C was to march on the previous day from Gafsa along the northern side of the screening hills to enter the plain via Maïzila pass, while on the same day, a temporary Combat Command D under Col. Robert V. Maraist moved from the Bou Chebka area through Fériana and Gafsa against Station de Sened, and thereafter eastward along the route of the railroad to Maknassy.[39]

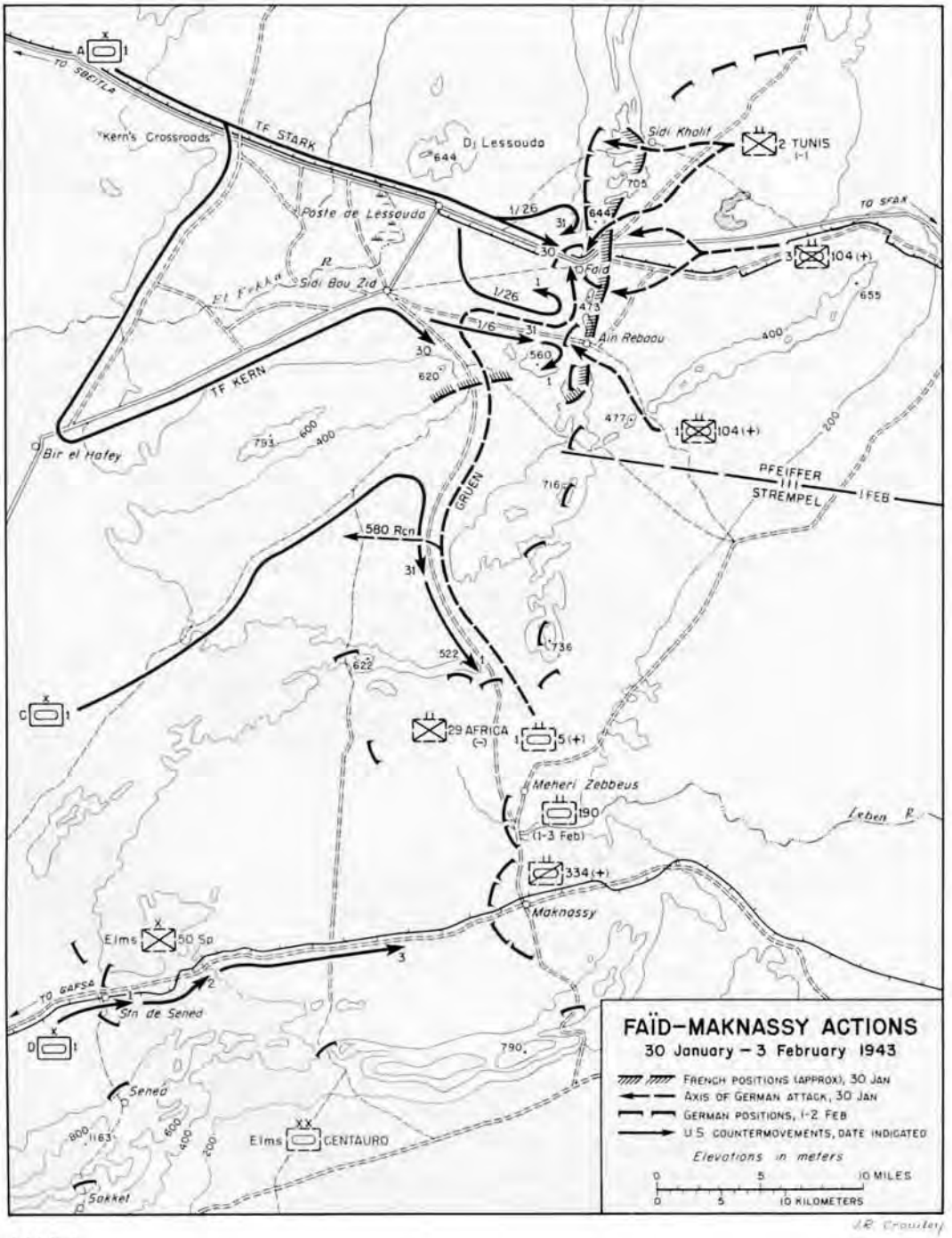
The Enemy Attacks Faïd Pass

Before this attack on Maknassy could begin, the enemy launched an attack of his own against Faïd pass, committing the *21st Panzer* Division, directly under *Fifth Panzer Army* control, aided by elements from the Italian *50th Special Brigade* (General Imperiali) and by army troops. The mission was to control the pass, to install security detachments on the chain of mountains from north of Faïd pass to Sened village, and to reconnoiter halfway to Sbeïtla. At the conclusion of the operation, the attacking force was expected to withdraw all but strong security detachments. These detachments, with others from *Brigade Imperiali*, would occupy key points in the Eastern Dorsal. Italians would hold the area of Station de Sened, blocking the narrow plain

[37] 6th Armd Inf AAR, 23 Jan–26 Feb 43.

[38] Rpt of Conf, Fredendall and Juin, Tébessa, 27 Jan 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 252.

[39] 1st Armd Div FO 3, 30 Jan 43.


FAÏD–MAKNASSY ACTIONS
30 January – 3 February 1943
FRENCH POSITIONS (APPROX), 30 JAN
AXIS OF GERMAN ATTACK, 30 JAN
GERMAN POSITIONS, 1-2 FEB
U.S. COUNTERMOVEMENTS, DATE INDICATED
Elevations in meters
0 5 10 MILES
0 5 10 KILOMETERS
TO SBEITLA
"Kern's Crossroads"
TF STARK
Dj Lessouda
644
Poste de Lessouda
Sidi Kholif
2 TUNIS
I-1
705
TO SFAX
1/26
31
644
30
Faid
3
104 (+)
655
El Frakha R
Sidi Bou Zid
1/26
1
473
1/6
31
Ain Rebaou
400
30
620
560
1
TF KERN
477
1
104 (+)
200
Bir el Hafey
793
600
400
PFEIFFER
STREMPEL
1 FEB
716
GRUEN
580 Rcn
31
736
522
622
1
C
1
29 AFRICA
(-)
1
5 (+)
Meheri Zebbeus
190
E (1-3 Feb)
Leben R
334 (+)
Maknassy
Elms
50 Sp
3
TO GAFSA
1
2
Stn de Sened
D
1
790
Sened
800
1163
600
400
200
Elms
XX
CENTAURO
Sakkel

MAP 9

there and maintaining liaison with *Division Centauro* east of Gafsa, at a pass between Sened village and Sakket.[40]

Faïd pass is a broad opening between Djebel Sidi Khalif (705) on the north and Djebel Bou Dzer (473) on the south through which ran the main tarmac highway from Sfax to Sbeïtla, and beyond. There were two other gaps in the Eastern Dorsal, which were crossed by inferior roads or trails. The first, about six miles north of Faïd pass, near Sidi Khalif, the other just south of Djebel Bou Dzer at Aïn Rebaou. A detachment of about 1,000 men from General Welvert's Constantine Division defended these passes under command of Brigadier General Schwartz. An attacking force, immediately after passing through Faïd defile on an approach from the coastal plain, would find, one mile to the southwest, the village of Faïd, a small collection of block-shaped, white masonry houses. The road forked at this village, the main road leading seven miles straight across the level plain to Poste de Lessouda while a secondary road ran west-southwest for eight miles to Sidi Bou Zid. Just to the north of Poste de Lessouda is the isolated hill mass of Djebel Lessouda (644) a bold butte with excellent observation over the wide stretches of plain which encircle it. Well to the southwest are a series of similar hills of which Djebel Ksaïra (560), near Aïn Rebaou pass, and Djebel Garet Hadid (620), west of Djebel Ksaïra, are prominent. Sidi Bou Zid's dark evergreens and gleaming white low buildings are about five miles south of Djebel Lessouda and four miles north-northwest of Djebel Garet Hadid. Geometric patterns of cultivated fields and orchards are adjacent to bright stuccoed buildings. Elsewhere are the irregular extensive fields of cactus and thin grass which grow generally without the benefit of irrigation. Here was the area in which the U.S. II Corps was to meet its first true challenge.

The *21st Panzer Division,* commanded by Colonel Hans Georg Hildebrandt, organized for the attack in two major groups, *Kampfgruppe Pfeiffer* and *Kampfgruppe Gruen. Kampfgruppe Pfeiffer* was further subdivided into northern, central, and southern task forces. The small northern task force was to assume protection of the north flank and to hold Sidi Khalif pass. This comprised the *2d Tunis Battalion* (—) reinforced by Italian elements. The center group, directly commanded by Major Pfeiffer, was to attack Faïd pass from the east, using the *3d Battalion, 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* (reinforced). One company of infantry from the *2d Tunis Battalion* would climb Hill 644 at the southern end of Djebel Sidi Khalif to strike the defenders of Faïd pass from the northern flank at the same time that the attack from the east began. The somewhat weaker southern task force consisting of the *1st Battalion, 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* (reinforced) was expected to seize and block Aïn Rebaou pass and protect the southern flank against the French on Djebel Ksaïra. To the south, nearer Maknassy, *Kampfgruppe Gruen* (*1st Battalion, 5th Panzer Regiment,* reinforced) was to make a longer encircling march through Maïzila pass. This maneuver would enable it to attack the French garrison at Faïd village from the rear and thence to join in seizing the pass. *Kampfgruppe Gruen* would be preceded by the *580th Reconnaissance Battalion* as far as a supporting position west of Djebel Boudinar (716). It was then to reconnoiter as far as

[40] *21st Panzer Div, Ia, KTB–Anlagen, Nr. 9, 1.I.–31.III.43, Afrika,* (cited hereafter as *21st Panzer Div, KTB Anlagen, Band 9*).

Bir el Hafey. A division reserve was held near the Sfax–Faïd road.[41]

The attack began early on 30 January. The northern and southern task forces (*Kampfgruppe Pfeiffer*) attained their objectives readily, but the center task force and *Kampfgruppe Gruen* were held up for five hours. They finally forced a stubbornly intervening French force back into Sidi Bou Zid and, after another one and one-half hour's fighting, captured Faïd village. It was then midafternoon, *Kampfgruppe Gruen* drove off an American armored force that approached from the northwest, after which the German tanks continued toward the pass in an effort to envelop the defenders. Mines knocked out four tanks and the effort was postponed at nightfall. By that time they had made contact with the company of the *2d Tunis Battalion* and sealed off the pass on the west. At the eastern end of the pass, Major Pfeiffer's center task force was twice stopped short; under cover of darkness, it got only 200 yards into the opening before being held up again. The French kept the area illuminated by parachute flares, forestalling night movement up the slopes by Axis troops to positions from which to aid a renewed attack in the morning. Thus during the night of 30 January the French defenders were surrounded but the Germans were far from holding Faïd pass.[42]

The American reconnoitering force which had approached Faïd from the northwest during the late afternoon was a small portion of General McQuillin's Combat Command A, U.S. 1st Armored Division, from Sbeïtla. McQuillin had been directed to help regain control of the pass.[43] In spite of early and repeated requests from the French, these first American reinforcements had been unable to travel the distance of more than thirty miles in time to intervene before the loss of Faïd village or the encirclement of Faïd pass. Allied air action also had been too weak to deter the enemy's advance. The II Corps' orders, received about 0930, 30 January, had prescribed that Combat Command A was to counterattack in order to restore the French positions at Faïd, but without reducing the covering force operating northeast of Sbeïtla or materially weakening the defense of Sbeïtla. At about 1000 General McQuillin dispatched a reconnaissance company to reconnoiter the Djebel Lessouda-Faïd area. Shortly thereafter he sent a group consisting of a company of tanks, a company of armored infantry, and an artillery battery, southward to Sidi Bou Zid ordering them to advance along a secondary route via Bir el Hafey. This reconnaissance company reported by 1400 that the enemy was holding the sector from Rebaou pass to Faïd village with infantry and tanks. Meantime enemy air intercepted American efforts to reinforce the advanced groups during daylight. At 1430, therefore, McQuillin decided to postpone his counterattack until early on 31 January. Dividing his command, he ordered a northern group to assemble in the vicinity of Poste de Lessouda, and a southern group

[41] *21st Panzer Div*, FO for the capture of the Faïd strongpoint, 26 Jan 43, *ibid.*

[42] *21st Panzer Div, KTB, 1.I.–31.III.43*, 30 Jan 43.

[43] 1st Armd Div FO 4, 30 Jan 43. Troops available to Combat Command A were: the 1st Armored Regiment (less the 1st and 2d Battalions); the 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry; the 26th Infantry (less Company C and 2d and 3d Battalions); the 1st Reconnaissance Troop; the 33d Field Artillery Battalion; the 91st Field Artillery Battalion; Company A, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion; Company C, 16th Armored Combat Engineers; and Battery D (less two platoons), 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion (SP).

in the Sidi Bou Zid area. These movements were to be executed under the cover of darkness. About 0330, 31 January, General McQuillin, who was accompanied by General Truscott of the AFHQ Advance Command Post, issued orders from Poste de Lessouda for an attack at 0700. One part of his force under Lt. Col. William B. Kern was to strike through Rebaou pass from Sidi Bou Zid to get east of the enemy at Faïd pass and the other under Colonel Stark, to advance against the Faïd area from Djebel Lessouda.[44]

American efforts to relieve the French in Faïd pass on 31 January were not successful. The enemy during the preceding night had emplaced and concealed his antitank and heavy machine guns, mortars, and artillery, and had put many of his tanks in defiladed positions. The American infantry, after making a limited penetration into the lower foothills north of Faïd pass, was repulsed by a thick curtain of fire. The medium tanks of Company H, U.S. 1st Armored Regiment, were lured within range of well-sited antitank weapons which destroyed at least eight vehicles. The American supporting artillery came under long-range counterbattery fire and was also heavily attacked by dive bombers. The southern force was delayed by enemy aviation and then driven back by the enemy ground troops. By 1400 on 31 January the enemy had succeeded in capturing Faïd pass. The American attack not only failed to relieve the French, but also, through absence of Allied air support, failed to prevent the enemy from bringing up reinforcements. The Germans were now firmly established on the Eastern Dorsal from Djebel Sidi Khalif to Maïzila pass where they had gained a foothold south and west of that gap.

At 0930 on 1 February Giraud called General Welvert's headquarters ordering that a strong protest be made to General Fredendall regarding the slowness of American intervention and ineffectiveness of U.S. air and artillery. But by 1 February the French in the pass could not be relieved nor Allied possession restored.[45] Nevertheless, efforts to drive out the enemy were not abandoned.

The Allied Attack on Maknassy Begins

The Germans had struck at Faïd pass while the Allied attack on Maknassy was being organized. As a result, General Fredendall faced the difficult tactical decision whether he should send Colonel Stack's force, Combat Command C, to join the counterattack at Faïd or use it for the attack on Maknassy.[46] Generals Giraud and

[44] Info supplied by Gen McQuillin to author. OCMH.

The northern group consisted of: the 1st Battalion (—), Headquarters Company, and Cannon, Antitank, and Medical Companies, 26th Infantry; a platoon from the 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion (SP); and Company H, 1st Armored Regiment, with a platoon from 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion attached. The tanks were to leave this force after taking Faïd village in order to attack southward along the mountains to Aïn Rebaou. The southern group included: the 1st Battalion (less Company B), 6th Armored Infantry; Company G and a platoon from Reconnaissance Company, 1st Armored Regiment; Company A (less a platoon), 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion; and one platoon from Company C, 16th Armored Combat Engineers. Battery B, 91st Field Artillery Battalion, was to support from a position east of Djebel Lessouda. CCA 1st Armd Div AAR, 23 Jan–26 Feb 43; 26th Inf AAR, 11 Nov 42–14 Apr 43, 23 Apr 43.

[45] Phone Msg, Gen Giraud to Capt Ciarlet to be transmitted to Gen Fredendall *et al.*, 1 Feb 43, in DMC Jnl, 1 Feb 43.

[46] Combat Command C, 1st Armored Division, on 30 January 1943 consisted of: the 6th Armored Infantry (less the 1st and 2d Battalion); Company

Welvert recommended that the force be brought south of Djebel Ksaïra to the Aïn Rebaou area by a route enabling it to strike the enemy from the rear. At 1300, 30 January, Stack received orders by telephone to start northeastward from Gafsa toward the area of Sidi Bou Zid with the mission of hitting ". . . in flank the force of enemy tanks and infantry thrusting at SIDI BOU ZID from the east, and also to strike any force moving from MAKNASSY toward SIDI BOU ZID." [47] Stack was out of direct communication with McQuillin, during the night of 30–31 January, which Combat Command C spent in bivouac about thirty miles southwest of Sidi Bou Zid. As he was nearing the Faïd battle area on 31 January, he received radioed orders at 1600 to "turn south and join in co-ordinated effort with Maraist on Maknassy." During the following night when he was only a few miles northeast of Maïzila pass on the trail to Maknassy, he was still out of communication with McQuillin at Faïd. Stack, following his instructions, blocked the northern mouth of Maïzila pass and prepared for a morning attack, leaving the action at Faïd pass to be completed by Combat Command A and General Welvert's troops.[48]

The orders sending Stack south were based on an overoptimistic concept of what was happening at Aïn Rebaou, for American troops were then understood to be advancing north along the eastern side of Djebel Bou Dzer when in fact they had been repulsed.[49] The opportunity for McQuillin and Stack to co-operate late on 31 January had thus been rejected in favor of combining Stack's attack on Maknassy with that by Maraist's force, but during the night of 31 January–1 February it was still feasible to postpone the Maknassy operation and to recall Combat Command C to the Faïd area. General Welvert was so thoroughly convinced of the merit of such a course that he sought out Stack that night and induced him to raise the question again with General Ward. Ward confirmed Fredendall's orders for Stack to co-operate with Maraist in attacking Maknassy, while McQuillin and French units under General Schwartz made one last attempt to recover Faïd pass from its Axis occupants.[50]

The Enemy Retains Faïd Pass

Near Sidi Bou Zid, General McQuillin sent Colonel Stark's force south by foot during the night to make the next day's main attack on Aïn Rebaou, converging on Kern's axis of approach. The advance on 1 February was not begun until noon when the sun was no longer low in front of the American forces. It opened with an extraordinarily heavy artillery preparation, followed by an infantry assault; the tanks were initially held in reserve for a later sweep against Faïd, if it should prove advisable. The infantry, after first advancing methodically behind the barrage, started up the lower slopes where they were eventually pinned down by machine gun, mortar, and

B (plus 2d Platoon, Company D), 81st Reconnaissance Battalion; Battery C, 68th Field Artillery Battalion; Company G, 13th Armored Regiment; the 1st Platoon, Company D, 16th Engineers (C); a detachment of Company B, Maintenance Battalion; a detachment of the 47th Medical Battalion; and the 1st Platoon, 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion (SP). 6th Armd Inf AAR, 23 Jan–26 Feb 43.

[47] 6th Armd Inf, Rpt of Combat Opns in North Africa, Nov 42–May 43, Pt. II, p. 9.

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] II Corps Sitrep, 1700, 31 Jan 43.

[50] DMC Jnl, 31 Jan 43. This contains a special note by General Welvert describing his efforts to co-ordinate American operation at Faïd.

heavy artillery fire as the barrage lifted. At this point fifteen enemy tanks made a sortie out of Faïd village and struck the left (northern) flank of the attacking infantry throwing their assault into confusion. The 3d Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, was now sent forward to get the attack in motion again but the American tanks were subjected to severe shelling from guns so skillfully hidden that observers and searching American artillery fire had failed to find them. By now the infantry was already falling back. There were no reserves. The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, pulled back to positions three to five miles east of Sidi Bou Zid, while the 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, turned southwest and occupied Djebel Ksaïra.[51]

McQuillin acknowledged candidly at the end of the day that he had failed to accomplish his mission. He pointed out that his right wing had been stopped and the infantry on the left had been driven back "in disorder" from a point close to the enemy's positions by the sudden attack of nine or more Mark IV tanks which had emerged from concealment. While these enemy tanks were being driven back by four American self-propelled 75-mm. guns, by tanks, and by tank destroyers, and pursued until they reached the cover of German antitank guns, the disorganized infantry had been able to withdraw.

Under orders on 2 February to pass to the defensive, Combat Command A organized positions on Djebel Ksaïra and set up a line east of Sidi Bou Zid while the Allied high command determined where to establish the main line of resistance. The enemy had already moved onto high ground east of Djebel Ksaïra and directly south of Rebaou pass, onto the heights north of that pass, and along the western slopes of Djebel Sidi Khalif. His observation points surveyed all approaches to the Faïd area. His tanks were withdrawn into the passes, but he emplaced artillery as heavy as 210-mm. howitzers where they could interdict Allied movement toward his infantry positions and outrange American and French guns in counterbattery fire. He remained in Faïd village while Sidi Bou Zid was occupied by the Allies.[52]

Operations Southwest of Pont-du-Fahs

While the enemy's attack at Faïd pass was succeeding, another attack, ordered by von Arnim on 28 January, directed against Hir Moussa crossroads and the heights northeast of Rebaa Oulad Yahia, was thrown back. (*See Map 8*) Success in this endeavor would have forced the Allied troops in the heights west of the Ousseltia

[51] (1) CCA 1st Armd Div S–2 Rpt, 1800–2300, 1 Feb 43. (2) 3d Bn 1st Armd Regt AAR, 1 Jan–21 Feb 43, 30 Jul 43. (3) 26th Inf AAR, 23 Apr 43, which reports casualties of ninety wounded and six or seven missing.

[52] (1) 6th Armd Inf AAR, 23 Jan–26 Feb 43. (2) Memo, CG CCA to CG 1st Armd Div, in 1st Armd Div Sitrep, 1–2 Feb 43. (3) 1st Armd Div FO 5, 1200, 3 Feb 43. (4) Losses reported by the 26th Infantry were 1 killed and 56 wounded and for 6th Armored Infantry 4 killed and 16 wounded. (5) French losses known on 2 February were 905 officers and men, killed or missing in action. DMC Jnl, 2 Feb 43. (6) The enemy reported capture of 1,047 prisoners of war (mostly French), 25 armored cars, 3 guns, 2 antiaircraft guns, 15 antitank guns, 8 mortars, 57 machine guns, 10 trucks, and 5 aircraft either destroyed or damaged. Msg, *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt, Nr. 1563/43,* to army groups, 4 Feb 43, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt,* File *Abendorientierungen Afrika, 1.I–13.V.43.* (7) Msg, CG II Corps to CG 1st Armd Div, 1030, 2 Feb 43, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. This message said: "Mission—Contain enemy at Faid and Fondouk [el Aouareb]. Active defense. Patrolling. Active use of arty fire. Insure no exit by enemy. Notify McQuillin at once."

valley to pull back in order to avoid being cut off, but on 31 January the armored force was repulsed short of Rebaa Oulad Yahia at Sidi Saïd by the British 36th Brigade (with the 2d Battalion, U.S. 16th Infantry, attached). Although the enemy broke off the attack that evening, his threat brought Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, hurrying back from the area southeast of Tébessa to which it had so recently been recalled from the Ousseltia valley. It spent 1 February at Hadjeb el Aïoun, and during the next night continued to its new station in the vicinity of Maktar, out of II Corps' area and in First Army reserve.

British 5 Corps (General Allfrey) attempted early in February to get into a position to cut the Pont-du-Fahs–Rebaa Oulad Yahia road at the junction just south of the reservoir. To accomplish this purpose, it became essential to gain control of Djebel Mansour (678) and its spur Djebel Alliliga, commanding the road at a point southeast of Bou Arada. Using elements of the British 1st Guards Brigade and 1st Parachute Brigade, Allfrey's attack in approximately battalion strength on 3 February did not quite succeed. Reinforcements by each side balanced out during the next two nights. After his counterattack on 5 February gained control of Djebel Mansour, the enemy finally drove the remaining British troops from Djebel Alliliga. The adversaries were left in deadlock fifteen miles southwest of Pont-du-Fahs, but with the Axis in firm possession of the approaches to that town.[53]

[53] (1) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (2) MC #T–3 (Nehring *et al.*), Pt. 3a. (3) Capt. Nigel Nicholson, *The Grenadier Guards in the War of 1939–1945* (London, 1949), II, 277. British casualties came to 260, with at least 35 killed and 16 missing.

II Corps Attack on Maknassy Ends

While the enemy's initiative southwest of Pont-du-Fahs and at Faïd pass drew Allied forces into containing positions, the operations by II Corps to seize Maknassy came to an end.

As Colonel Stack's Combat Command C opened its attack on Maïzila pass on 1 February, under II Corps orders which General Ward had confirmed during the previous night, it soon found that enemy reinforcements had been brought up during the night. Enemy infantry and armored cars, supported by artillery, counterattacked at 0730. The enemy was driven back, but new divisional orders to Combat Command C to postpone full commitment in the pass kept the forces waiting until afternoon. The course of Maraist's battle for Station de Sened, of McQuillin's at Faïd pass, and of the enemy attack northeast of Rebaa Oulad Yahia for a time made it difficult to decide the best way to employ Combat Command C. Then at 1400, orders terminating this indecision came through to Colonel Stack: "Secure Maïzila Pass, including both exits. Reconnoiter to south with view to attack on Maknassy." The afternoon assault opened with a twenty-minute artillery preparation followed at 1710 with an advance by the tanks and two companies of infantry on foot. Other infantry were carried in half-tracks to objectives already captured in order to organize them quickly for defense. Soft ground and antitank fire delayed the general advance, but the troops gained the southwestern side of the pass and part of the northeastern side before darkness forced them to suspend the attack. Preparations were made to complete the task in the morning. Reported losses were 3 killed, 20 wounded, and 43 missing. Combat Command C might rea-

sonably expect to reach Maknassy on the next day. As it prepared for the last phase of its operation, its orders were abruptly revised. Combat Command C was recalled from the pass and sent north to Hadjeb el Aïoun on the night of 1–2 February as part of a general defensive shift to counter an enemy threat against that sector of the Allied line.[54]

Meanwhile, Colonel Maraist's force, called Combat Command D, led by elements of the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion, marched on Station de Sened from Gafsa early on 31 January.[55] The reconnaissance force slipped around Station de Sened to occupy high ground east of it. The infantry was ordered to move in trucks cross country on a wide front to a point about ten miles west of the objective, then to detruck and proceed on foot, attacking from the south with two companies abreast and a third echeloned to the right rear. The tanks were to approach parallel to the road but were to bypass the objective on the north and turn in order to strike from the east. The artillery was to support the attack from positions northwest of the hamlet.

The scheme of maneuver somewhat resembled that which had been so successful in the raid a week earlier, but several factors in the situation were markedly different.[56] The attack began much later in the day. Although the tanks and artillery were in position at 1345, the infantry convoy was slow in coming up, kept marching past the assigned detrucking point, and was insufficiently dispersed. From the beginning, heavy enemy air attacks repeatedly harassed the operation, with Allied planes unable to be of help. A dive-bombing attack by eight Stukas at 1330, and another by twenty-four at 1656, stunned the infantry and caused substantial casualties. The troops could not be formed for an assault by 1700; so the entire force was reorganized for the night, and the attack was rescheduled for dawn. The 175th Field Artillery Battalion and the 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry, were sent up during the night to supplement the 1st Battalion, but except for a small 168th Infantry regimental group with Col. Thomas D. Drake, and a portion of the 2d Battalion, the troops were unwittingly guided past the American lines into the enemy's rear area. In the morning, most of the "lost battalion" was either taken captive or otherwise prevented from taking part in the attack, even though some troops managed to find their way back before noon.[57]

Station de Sened was more strongly defended than on 24 January. Combat Command D had expected about 250 men with eight machine guns, four 47-mm. antitank guns, and two 75-mm. field guns emplaced behind mine fields west of the village. A few armored cars had also been observed there, but the main force was supposed to be east of Maknassy. Actually, the objective was well defended from the start and when

[54] 6th Armd Inf AAR, 23 Jan–26 Feb 43.

[55] The force was built around the medium tanks of the 3d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, less Company G (Lt. Col. Ben Crosby), the 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry (Lt. Col. John C. Petty), and the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, less Companies A and B. The Cannon Company, 39th Infantry; 68th Field Artillery Battalion, less Battery C; Company D, 16th Armored Engineers (C); and one platoon of the 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion (SP) were included.

[56] CCD 1st Armd Div Hist Rcds, 1 Mar 43, in 1st Armd Div Hist Rcds, Vol. XI.

[57] (1) Memo, H. P. Dittemore for CG 1st Armd Div, 11 Feb 43, sub: Investigation. Copy in possession of Brig Gen Hamilton H. Howze. (2) 175th FA Bn War Diary, 31 Jan–2 Feb 43. (3) Memo, Gen Fredendall for CinC AF, 10 Mar 43, sub: Notes on recent opns on the Tunisian front, par. 8.

the position was threatened, the enemy reacted quickly by sending reinforcements from Gabès.[58] In a slow attack on 1 February, the Americans finally penetrated the hamlet about 1640, held the town during the night, and prepared to continue the advance next morning to the east, where stronger enemy forces had assembled.

"It is of vital necessity for you to get forward and place the infantry on its objective *four* (4) miles east of Sened Station," General Fredendall informed Colonel Maraist, "Too much time has been wasted already. I shall expect you to be on the objective not later than 1000 hours, 2 February. Use your tanks and shove. From 1800 hours, this date, (1 February) General Ray E. Porter, USA, will be in command of your operation until completion of your mission, after which you will revert to Corps control in the Gafsa area." [59]

On the same night, General Ward, unaware of these orders, informed Colonel Maraist that the units of the 168th Infantry and 175th Field Artillery were to revert to General Porter's command after Combat Command D had gained the position east of Station de Sened, and only then was Maraist to move to the Gafsa area to enter corps reserve. The 81st Reconnaissance Battalion would then shift to Sbeïtla, where the 1st Armored Division headquarters would open at 0200, 2 February. Maraist was directed finally to secure a position favorable to defense "three to four miles east of Sened Station." After it had been organized by the 168th Infantry (less the 3d Battalion), he was to remain in a supporting position until relieved by Porter's direction.[60]

These confusing orders were issued in ignorance of General Eisenhower's directive, drawn up in conference with General Anderson and Truscott at Télergma airfield that same morning, that the central front must be securely held by employing the U.S. 1st Armored Division as a concentrated force, even if that involved pulling back the line from the Eastern Dorsal, evacuating Gafsa, and forfeiting the use of Thélepte airfield. "If Maknassy is not taken by tonight, the whole division should be withdrawn into a central position and kept concentrated," Eisenhower had insisted.[61]

The morning attack toward Maknassy on 2 February proceeded rapidly against light artillery and machine gun fire until about 0930, when it was interrupted by a very heavy dive-bombing attack on the tanks. By noon, the infantry in force held the ridge east of Sened. The tanks reassembled in readiness to meet a counterattack; the infantry dug in; the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion's units took up positions protecting the north and south flanks; and the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion's reconnaissance elements pushed five miles farther east. The counterattack came about 1600. A dive bombing by twenty-four Stukas first shook up the infantry. When sixteen enemy tanks approached on the left flank, some excited troops started running back and others jammed the road with vehicles headed west. These troops had to be firmly checked and turned around. Five enemy tanks got through to the main position, but were driven off by American tanks and tank de-

[58] (1) Memo by Arty and Rcn Survey Officer 1st Armd Div. Copy in OCMH. (2) *21st Panzer Div, KTB, 1.I.–31.III.43*, 31 Jan and 1 Feb 43.

[59] (1) 1st Armd Div Hist Rcds, Vol. II. (2) Memo by Arty and Rcn Survey Officer. Copy in OCMH.

[60] Copies in 1st Armd Div Hist Rcds, Vol. II.

[61] Mins of Conf between Eisenhower and Anderson, Feb 43. AFHQ C–3 Ops 58/2.1, Micro Job 10C, Reel 188D.

stroyers over an hour later. By 1900, the position was generally restored, and held throughout the night.[62]

The attack toward Maknassy was renewed at daylight on 3 February with tanks, tank destroyers, and assault guns out in front of the infantry line to repel any counterattack by Axis forces. Well forward was the reconnaissance unit of 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, which got within six miles of Maknassy by noon. Artillery fired on elusive enemy detachments, and fifteen American B–25's bombed enemy tanks near Maknassy at about 1530 and Station de Sened (in American possession) by mistake soon afterward. At this juncture, Maraist's attack on Maknassy from the west was broken off when orders from II Corps' advanced command post were received directing Combat Command D's withdrawal at 1830 to Gafsa. The move was completed before daylight.

Losses inflicted on the enemy amounted to seven light tanks, two French 75-mm. guns, and two 88-mm. dual-purpose guns, considerable transportation equipment, along with a small quantity of ammunition, destroyed or captured, and about 160 prisoners taken. American losses reported included four light tanks, nine half-tracks, one self-propelled 105-mm. howitzer, one 75-mm. pack howitzer, two self-propelled and one towed 37-mm. guns, as well as lesser weapons and transport vehicles. Casualties were 51 killed, 164 wounded, 116 missing.[63]

The force Colonel Maraist and Colonel Stack had encountered was *Kampfgruppe Strempel.* When American attacks on Sened Station and Maïzila pass threatened to interfere with the *21st Panzer Division's* operations in the Faïd pass area, Colonel Hildebrandt organized a provisional headquarters under his chief of staff, Lt. Col. Strempel, ordering him to defend at all cost the sector from Djebel Matleg (477) to Djebel Bou Hedma (790), boundary with the Italian *Centauro Division. Group Strempel* consisted of the *334th Reconnaissance Battalion, 29th Africa Battalion, 580th Reconnaissance Battalion,* and miscellaneous units of the Italian *50th Special Brigade,* reinforced by artillery and flak. The *190th Panzer Battalion,* ubiquitous "fire brigade" of the Tunisian bridgehead, was at hand as a tactical reserve held in the Meheri Zebbeus area.[64]

II Corps Goes on the Defensive

At 1200, 3 February, Headquarters, 1st Armored Division, issued new orders based upon the loss of Faïd pass and the vulnerability of the poorly armed French forces in the Fondouk el Aouareb–Pichon area to an attack of the kind which had succeeded at Faïd.[65] The mission given the division was to contain the enemy from Fondouk el Aouareb gap to Maïzila pass, a distance exceeding fifty miles. The division was directed to plan to reinforce the French troops quickly wherever indicated, to engage in active reconnaissance and patrols, to use artillery freely, and to employ mobile striking forces in counterattacks against any enemy penetrations of the eastern mountain

[62] (1) Memo, Col Thomas D. Drake for ACofS G–2, 14 May 45, sub: Account of 168th Inf opns 24 Dec 42–17 Feb 43. DRB AGO. (2) 175th FA Bn War Diary, 31 Jan–2 Feb 43.

[63] (1) Casualty List (omitting 81st Rcn Bn after 1 Feb), 5 Feb 43. Copy in 1st Armd Div Hist Rcds, Vol. II. About half the casualties were in the 168th Infantry. (2) General von Arnim considered that when Maraist's attack was called off, all means of defending Maknassy against it had dropped to minor proportions. MS #C–098 (von Arnim).

[64] *21st Panzer Div, KTB,* 1–3 Feb 43.

[65] FO 5.

chain. At Maktar, in First Army reserve was Combat Command B, still withdrawn from General Ward's control.[66] Near Hadjeb el Aïoun, was Combat Command C, only nominally under division control and directed by II Corps to cover the twenty-mile zone from north of Djebel Trozza to a screening ridge southeast of Hadjeb el Aïoun. Combat Command A covered the rest of the chain of mountains as far as Djebel Meloussi, west of Maïzila pass. At First Army's insistence Combat Command D was recalled from its operation toward Maknassy in order to enter II Corps Reserve at Bou Chebka in place of Combat Command B. The 81st Reconnaissance Battalion (less Company B) went into 1st Armored Division Reserve at Sbeïtla. The 168th Infantry (less 1st Battalion) was also to pass to direct corps control and to move from Gafsa to Sbeïtla and thence to Sidi Bou Zid. The 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry, went into II Corps Reserve at Fériana. Greater mobility in the northern sector was accomplished by the improvement of a road from Hadjeb el Aïoun to El Ala, a project carried through by Company B, 16th Armored Engineer Battalion, and units from the U.S. 34th Division.

These dispositions were intended to hold as much as possible of the forward areas while the Allies prepared for sustained, aggressive action in the month of March. As soon as an opportunity for a blow at the Axis line of communications on the coastal plain should present itself, the forces could assemble west of the mountain barrier, in which all the gaps were held by the enemy, and fight its way through whichever gap seemed to offer most hope of success. But it was hardly to be expected that the enemy would quietly permit strong forces to be organized for the purpose of piercing the barrier and wreaking havoc in the rear of Field Marshal Rommel's army. The loss of Faïd pass, moreover, made the Allies so much more vulnerable to hostile, disruptive incursions that retention of the areas east of the Western Dorsal was correspondingly more hazardous. The dispositions described above were risky, and the result of difficult decisions reached by Anderson, Fredendall, and their chiefs of staff, on the evening of 5 February.[67]

Anxiety about the Axis forces at Faïd led Fredendall not only to assign specific responsibility for containing them to the Commanding General, 1st Armored Division, on 10 February, after a visit to his command post near Sbeïtla, but in addition, to issue orders very specifically controlling the means made available there. On 11 February, Maj. Warren Hugulet, liaison officer of the 1st Armored Division, brought to Sbeïtla the following directive from General Fredendall:

HEADQUARTERS II CORPS
APO NO. 302

11 February, 1943

SUBJECT: Defense of FAID Position.
TO: Commanding General, 1st Armored division.

1. You will take immediate steps to see that the following points concerning defense of the FAID position are put into effect:

a. Scheme of Defense: DJ. KSAIRA on the South and DJ LESSOUDA on the North are the key terrain features in the defense of FAID. These two features must be strongly

[66] The British 6th Armoured Division was being rearmed with U.S. Sherman tanks at this time and was not, therefore, used as First Army Reserve. Memo, Eisenhower for the record, 25 Feb 43, in CinC AF Diary, Bk. V, pp. 256a–256e.

[67] (1) Msg, Gen Kuter to CinC AF, 6 Feb 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log 46. (2) A counterattack to be led by General Porter to regain Faïd pass was abandoned on 5 February 1943. He was transferred to AFHQ advanced command post from II Corps.

held, with a mobile reserve in the vicinity of SIDI BOU ZID which can rapidly launch a counter attack. Plans for all possible uses of this reserve should be prepared ahead of time. A battalion of infantry should be employed for the defense of DJ. KSAIRA, and the bulk of a battalion of infantry together with a battery of artillery and a company of tanks for the defense of DJ. LESSOUDA. Remainder of artillery is at present satisfactorily located. It should, however, furnish its own local protection, and be prepared to shift rapidly.

b. Additional Reserves: The 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry, now under your control, should immediately send a liaison officer to Hq., CC A. Inasmuch as this Battalion will likely be employed by McQuillin should an attack in the FAID area develop, the Battalion Commander, in collaboration with McQuillin should prepare plans for the use of his Battalion. These plans should ensure rapid movement and employment of this Battalion once it has been ordered.

c. Reconnaissance: It is extremely important that reconnaissance and counter reconnaissance be conducted by you from HADJEB EL AIOUN on the North to the pass between DJ. MAIZTLA [Djebel Maïzila] and DJ. GOULEB on the South. In this area strong listening posts should be established 24 hours a day from which raids, when appropriate, can be conducted. It is essential that this reconnaissance and counter reconnaissance link up with that now being conducted by the 1st British Derbyshire Yeomanry. The force now at McQuillin's disposal is not sufficient for the area for which he is responsible. The bulk of your 81st Reconnaissance Battalion should be used in the area HADJEB EL AIOUN–MAIZTLA–GOULEB PASS.

d. Patrols: It is vital that strong infantry foot patrols be sent forward at night from DJ. LESSOUDA and DJ. KSAIRA. These patrols must be offensive. They must keep track of the enemy's strength and organization. They should be especially watchful for any attempt of the enemy to debouch from the passes at night. They *must* take prisoners. It is also important that these patrols locate the presence of minefields, if any, in areas like the gap between DJ. RECHAIB and DJ. BOU DZEL [Djebel Bou Dzer]. The latter would, of course, be of great importance in the event we decide to capture FAID.

e. Use of Wire, AT Mines, Trip Wire, etc: I desire that you make maximum use of all available means to strengthen the positions outlined above. The necessary materiel is available and should be used immediately.

f. Photography: I have instructed my G–2 to furnish you as soon as possible a photographic strip covering the area: Pass at T8358–FAID PASS–REBOU [Aïn Rebaou]–MATLEG PASS. I have asked that every effort be made to secure good pictures of the Pass at T8358, FAID PASS, and MATLEG PASS.

2. I desire that a copy of this directive, together with your own comments, be sent to McQuillin.

3. You will inform me when the instructions enumerated in this directive have been complied with.

L. R. FREDENDALL
Major General, U.S.A.
Commanding.

[The following was written in longhand:]

In other words I want a very strong active defense and not just a passive one. The enemy must be harassed at every opportunity. Reconnaissance must never be relaxed—especially at night. Positions indicated must be wired and mined now.

L. R. F.[68]

The note of hopefulness with which January had opened, and the high expectation of II Corps of carrying the battle to the enemy, had led early in February to temporary frustration.[69] The enemy was still calling the tune. Until the Allies were strong enough to resume the offensive in March, they would have to fight the enemy where he chose to attack, and when.

[68] 1st Armd Div Rpt of Opns, 3–18 Feb 1943, 1st Armd Div Hist Rcds, Vol. IV.

[69] Operations thus far had cost II Corps 699 casualties only (50 killed, 487 wounded, 152 missing, 10 captured). Msg, 10 Feb 43, Entry 174, II Corps G–3 Jnl.

CHAPTER XXI

The Enemy Strikes At U.S. II Corps

Allied Expectations

No one doubted that the enemy would attack again in central Tunisia; the only question was where. The movements of his mobile, armored troops were attentively watched, for they would deliver the blow. The *21st Panzer Division* was known to be in the Faïd–Maknassy area. The *10th Panzer Division* had shifted southeastward from the Medjerda valley so that most of it was in the vicinity of Kairouan, opposite the French XIX Corps. The *Italian 131st (Centauro) Armored Division* was northwest of Gabès in position extending up toward El Guettar and Gafsa. The *15th Panzer Division* was near the Mareth Position in southern Tunisia. There were indications that an attack might be made toward Pichon, either by way of Fondouk el Aoureb gap or by one of the routes north of it. Various signs seemed to point to enemy attacks along more than one axis. The evidence led Col. B. A. Dickson, II Corps Intelligence Officer (G–2), to warn of a main attack on Gafsa from Gabès plus a major diversionary effort in the Pichon or Pont-du-Fahs areas. To the Military Intelligence Division of the War Department, the enemy's situation seemed to indicate a major attack on the Sfax–Tébessa axis and an auxiliary attack from Kairouan moving west and northwest.[1]

General Eisenhower had hoped that the Allies could stabilize the front and at the same time free a force large enough to retake Faïd pass. In view of enemy capabilities this hope could not be realized. Instead, General Anderson decided to abandon a contemplated counteroffensive from Le Kef to Faïd, to concentrate mobile armored forces at Fériana and Sbeïtla, with forward elements in the vicinity of Gafsa and Faïd, and to hold the existing Allied positions from Medjez el Bab to Pichon against all but the strongest enemy pressures. Provision was made for temporarily switching the bulk of Allied tactical air support, which would

[1] (1) MS # T–3 (Nehring *et al.*), Pt. 3a. (2) AFHQ Rpt, G–2 Estimate of Axis Offensive Capabilities After Panzer Armee Rommel Is in Occupation of the Mareth Line, 7 Feb 43. AFHQ Micro Job 26, Reel 72 Spec. (3) Msg 1784, USFOR to FREEDOM, 1700, 17 Feb 43, sub: Axis forces in North Africa. Non-Current Permanent Rcd File, Misc Cbls—1942–43, AG 311.22. (4) II Corps G–2 Estimate 8, 7 Feb 43; II Corps Periodic Rpts 39, 13 Feb 43, and 40, 14 Feb 43; 1st Armd Div G–3 Periodic Rpts 16, 9 Feb 43, and 18, 11 Feb 43. (5) DMC Jnl, 9 Feb 43. (6) Msg, XIX Corps to II Corps (G–3), 2100, 9 Feb 43, in II Corps G–3 Jnl, 0641, 10 Feb 43. (7) Interv with Col B. A. Dickson (Ret.), 13 Dec 50.

normally be assigned to the northern sectors, to central Tunisia when necessary.[2]

Anderson's revised mission became that of protecting airfields at Souk el Khemis, Tébessa, and Thélepte for continuous use by Allied air units, and of securing the openings at Medjez el Bab and Bou Arada through which the First Army would make its ultimate attack on Tunis in conjunction with Eighth Army. Second in importance only to this paramount role was another mission: recapture of the defiles held by the enemy, in order to improve the Allied position when the final offensive began, and to interfere with the enemy's line of communications on the coastal plain. Anderson was to avoid "costly failures" injurious to morale by committing sufficient forces in any attack. Finally, he was directed to keep the mobile striking forces in the south well concentrated in order to strike en masse when the need should arise, and to forego for the present the intended assembly of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division in army reserve near Guelma.[3]

Allied Dispositions, 13 February

British First Army undertook to reorganize its 5 Corps front while the enemy's attack was being prepared, partly to restore the many small units separated from their parent organizations and partly to achieve the long-deferred establishment of a substantial First Army reserve. The withdrawal of *10th Panzer Division* from positions along the northern front into a mobile reserve farther south, the arrival of the British 46th Division, in the forward area, and the introduction into the French sector of elements of the U.S. 1st and 34th Infantry Divisions—all made it possible to consider withdrawing the British 6th Armoured Division from the Bou Arada valley into army reserve. The division was to be refitted near Rhardimaou with new Sherman tanks which were being brought in via Bône, and was to relinquish its own lighter tanks for use by the French. Orders on 12 February specified relief of the British 6th Armoured Division between 15 and 28 February; the 16/5 Lancers had already begun to leave its old tanks at a depot at Ebba Ksour on 12 February preparatory to receiving the Shermans.[4] Forward areas would be held during the reorganization by a smaller concentration of infantry than heretofore. To offset this weakness General Anderson prescribed that each likely route of approach by enemy armor be heavily mined, that the mine fields be covered by infantry and artillery, that a mobile reserve be kept in each sector, and that observation be continuous and be supplemented at night by energetic patrolling. The much desired army reserve, once in being, would make it possible to counter each Axis thrust without improvising formations for each defensive operation.

The 133d and 135th Combat Teams, U.S. 34th Infantry Division, made the long wintry journey from the Oran area to Tunisia during the second week of February. They were ordered to relieve French units from the Algiers Division, and indeed, Col. Robert W. Ward's 135th Infantry had barely completed that process near Pichon before the enemy's attack began. The 133d

[2] (1) Ltr, Eisenhower to Fredendall, 4 Feb 43. OPD Exec 3, Item 1a. (2) Msg, Adv CP Allied ASC to CinC AF, 6 Feb 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 46.

[3] Dir, CinC AF to CG First Army, 11 Feb 43. AFHQ G–3 Opns 58/2.1, Micro Job 10C, Reel 188D.

[4] (1) First Army Ops Instruc 14, 12 Feb 43. DRB AGO. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

Combat Team (Col. Ray C. Fountain) farther west was then diverted to the vicinity of Hadjeb el Aïoun. The 34th Division (General Ryder) took control as the enemy's attack started.

General Allen's U.S. 1st Infantry Division (less Combat Teams 18 and 26) remained under General Koeltz's command and in positions in the Ousseltia valley. The 18th Combat Team farther north was withdrawn on 13–14 February by British 5 Corps into reserve preparatory to transfer to the French XIX Corps. The unit was scheduled to relieve the British 36th Brigade in the Rebaa Oulad Yahia valley later that month. It would thereby extend the American-held portion of General Koeltz's front before the end of February, while the 26th Combat Team would come from General Fredendall's corps about 3 March to relieve French troops scheduled for rest and reequipment. These arrivals would reunite the U.S. 1st Infantry Division after almost three months of dispersal. In the Pichon area was the French Light Armored Brigade which had passed to the command of General St. Didier on 6 February.[5]

The southern flank of the French Corps was covered on the eve of the attack by Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division. This force, which included 110 medium tanks and 69 guns, and was directly under First Army control, was east of Maktar. Next to it on the south was Colonel Stack's Combat Command C, of the same division, a somewhat weaker group, and south of that unit was General McQuillin's Combat Command A, reinforced by the 168th Combat Team (less 1st Battalion) under Colonel Drake, both controlled by II Corps through Headquarters, 1st Armored Division.[6]

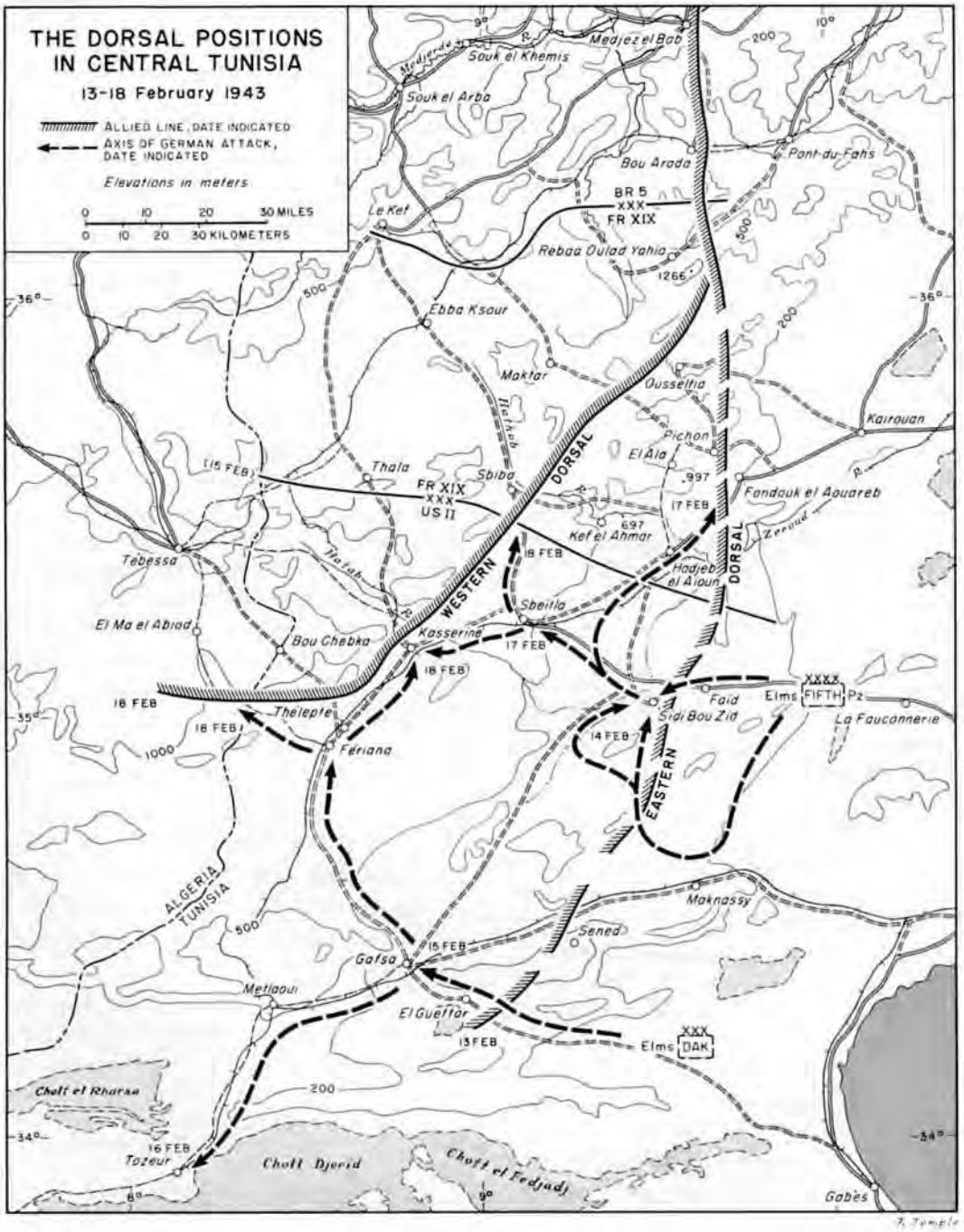
Headquarters, U.S. 1st Armored Division, near Sbeïtla and the division reserve there were connected through Kasserine with French and American units at Fériana, Gafsa, and El Guettar. At Fériana, a small force of all arms was assembling under command of Colonel Stark. At Gafsa, and southeast of it at the village of El Guettar, was the extreme south wing of the active Allied front. The Allied high command, after some irresolution, determined that Gafsa could not be strengthened enough to hold it against any probable enemy force. In case of necessity, the Gafsa force would be evacuated toward Fériana, where a counterattack in sufficient strength could be mounted. In the Advance Headquarters, II Corps, at the Hotel de France in Gafsa, Col. Frederic B. Butler relieved General Porter and with Colonel Morlière of the Constantine Division directed operations by a mixed American and French command as far as El Guettar.[7] The arc from Sbeïtla through Kasserine and Fériana to Gafsa and El Guettar was screened to the east and south by security detachments and beyond them, by roving patrols. The latter were conducted for II Corps by Squadrons B and D, 1st Derbyshire Yeomanry.

Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower and General Anderson met at General Fredendall's headquarters near Tébessa on 13 February to

[5] (1) 133d Inf and 135th Inf Hists. (2) 1st Inf Div G–3 Rpt of Opns, 15 Jan–8 Apr 43. (3) XIX Corps Jnl, 1–13 Feb 43.

[6] (1) II Corps AAR, 2 May 43. (2) 1st Armd Div Tank Status Rpt, 12 Feb 43, Entry 210 in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[7] (1) II Corps AAR, 2 May 43. (2) Msg, Truscott to AFHQ G–3, 6 Feb 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 49. (3) Phone Conv, CG First Army to G–3 II Corps, 1355, 8 Feb 43, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (4) II Corps FO 1 (Stark Force), 14 Feb 43. (5) DMC Jnl, 9 and 12 Feb 43. (6) Interv with Brig Gen Frederic B. Butler, 11 Jan 50.


THE DORSAL POSITIONS
IN CENTRAL TUNISIA
13-18 February 1943
ALLIED LINE, DATE INDICATED
AXIS OF GERMAN ATTACK, DATE INDICATED
Elevations in meters
0 10 20 30 MILES
0 10 20 30 KILOMETERS
Medjerda
Souk el Khemis
Souk el Arba
Medjez el Bab
Bou Arada
Pont-du-Fahs
Le Kef
BR 5
XXX
FR XIX
Rebaa Oulad Yahia
1266
Ebba Ksour
Maktar
Ousseltia
Kairouan
Pichon
El Ala
997
17 FEB
Fondouk el Aouareb
Zeroud
Thala
(15 FEB)
Sbiba
FR XIX
XXX
US II
Kef el Ahmar
697
18 FEB
Hadjeb el Aioun
DORSAL
WESTERN
Tebessa
Hafsa
Sbeitla
El Ma el Abiad
Bou Chebka
Kasserine
17 FEB
18 FEB
18 FEB
Thelepte
18 FEB
Feriana
XXXX
FIFTH
Pz
Elms
Faid
Sidi Bou Zid
La Fauconnerie
14 FEB
EASTERN
ALGERIA
TUNISIA
Maknassy
Sened
15 FEB
Gafsa
Metlaoui
El Guettar
13 FEB
XXX
DAK
Elms
Chott el Rharsa
16 FEB
Tozeur
Chott Djerid
Chott el Fedjadj
Gabès
T. Temple

MAP 10

review the disposition of forces, American, British, and French. (*Map 10.*) The Commander in Chief, Allied Force, then concluded that they were "as good as could be made pending the development of an actual attack and in view of the great value of holding the forward regions, if it could possibly be done." During the night, he went forward as far as Sbeïtla and Sidi Bou Zid, getting back to Tébessa a little before daylight. All along the line from Pont-du-Fahs to Gafsa, the word had been flashed from First Army's headquarters in Laverdure late on 13 February that an attack would be made by the enemy the next day.[8]

The Enemy's Intentions

The enemy had considered making the forthcoming attack ever since Rommel in November first pointed out the advantages of combining his retreating force with that already in Tunisia in order to gain the margin of superiority necessary for a drive into Algeria.[9] On 4 February, when the volume of logistical support to Tunisia had not yet reached a level which could sustain a drive for long, Rommel revived his suggestion in another memorandum to *Comando Supremo*. Rommel then proposed that he leave part of his army at the Mareth Position in order with its mobile portion to strike Gafsa from the southeast while mobile elements of von Arnim's command hit simultaneously from the northeast.[10] The situation, Rommel believed, was temporarily propitious. The longer the attack was postponed, the greater the likelihood that the British Eighth Army could hamper its full execution, and the stronger the American forces to be overcome. On the other hand, should no such attack be attempted, the Allies would be far more likely to succeed in pinning down von Arnim's army while striking that of Rommel from both the front and the rear. The conditions for success therefore seemed to be: swift and surprising attack within the next few days; concentrated attack by superior forces; and unified command disregarding the boundary between the two Axis Army zones.

The German high command had already formulated plans to establish a unified command when the presence of two Axis armies in Tunisia made such a headquarters necessary, but at this juncture, conditions made them unready to put those plans in effect. Operations as aggressive as those which Rommel was advocating would lack the degree of control essential to success. As soon as possible, Axis strategy required the extension westward of the bridgehead near Tunis so that it embraced at least the Djebel Abiod–Medjez el Bab road. The plans for the attacks on Sidi Bou Zid and Gafsa were therefore essentially defensive in concept. Because the Axis command left the ground forces to be co-ordinated rather than commanded, a swift adjustment of plans to take advantage of opportunities could not be made.

[8] (1) II Corps G–3 Jnl, 14 Feb 43, Entry 306. (2) XIX Corps Jnl, 13 Feb 43. (3) Ltr, Eisenhower to Marshall, 16 Feb 43. Copy in WDCSA 381 Africa. (4) Generals Patton and Smith were at Eighth Army headquarters in Tripoli; General Clark was ill; and General Alexander and Air Chief Marshal Tedder had not yet assumed their new commands.

[9] See pp. 322–23 above.

[10] Memo, *German-Italian Panzer Army* to *Comando Supremo*, 4 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 8, Anlage 995*. A blow through Gafsa and Sbeïtla on Tébessa was earlier described as an objective of second priority on 19 January 1943 in *OKW/WFSt, KTB*, 19 Jan 43.

Fifth Panzer Army had independent plans for the employment of both *10th Panzer Division* and *21st Panzer Division.* It also controlled the growing *Division Centauro.* Its southern boundary extended to the 34th parallel until 12 February, when the area for which Rommel's army was responsible was extended northward to include Gafsa, Sened, and Sfax, covering an area vital to the security of that army but beyond its power to defend effectively against strong simultaneous attacks there and in southern Tunisia. Thus the planning for what Rommel referred to as a "Gafsa operation" involved the use of troops chiefly controlled by von Arnim. The latter was planning to push back that part of the Allied forward line which ran between Pichon and Maknassy, using all his mobile troops not otherwise inextricably committed elsewhere.[11]

Comando Supremo first ordered an attack against the Gafsa area, primarily to destroy Allied forces, and only secondarily to gain territory. In this operation Rommel would command all armored and mobile elements of the two panzer armies not absolutely indispensable to operations on other fronts. The *10th Panzer* and *21st Panzer Divisions* from the northern army and the *15th Panzer Division* from the southern force would be supported by *Fliegerkorps Tunis.*[12]

When Kesselring, Rommel, and von Arnim met on 9 February to discuss these orders, the most recent reconnaissance reports revealed that American units were leaving Gafsa for more northerly stations. The two army commanders then revised the plans. The attack was now to consist of an initial operation against Sidi Bou Zid by *Fifth Panzer Army,* using *10th Panzer* and *21st Panzer Divisions,* and a later joint attack under Rommel's command against Gafsa by a *Kampfgruppe* taken from the *German Africa Corps* and supported by elements of the *21st Panzer Division. Comando Supremo* revised its directive and Kesselring approved the plans to execute it.[13]

The armored strength of the Axis forces available for the attack at Sidi Bou Zid exceeded 200 Mark III and Mark IV tanks, plus 11 or 12 Mark VI Tigers. The *10th Panzer Division* had 110 tanks in four battalions; *21st Panzer Division,* 91 tanks in three battalions; and *Division Superga* had an attached German company with several Tigers. By delaying the attack on Gafsa until the elements of the *21st Panzer Division* could also take part, a force of some 160 tanks might be employed there. The armored units to be drawn from south Tunisia came to 53 German and 17 Italian tanks.[14] The Axis forces were matched by the 1st Armored Division, which had 202 medium and 92 light tanks in operation, and lighter armored vehicles and artillery that considerably outnumbered those of the attacking force.[15] The American division, if concentrated, could provide formidable op-

[11] *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Band 2,* 3–13 Feb 43.

[12] Rad, *Comando Supremo* to *German-Italian* and *Fifth Panzer Armies,* 8 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 8, Anlage 1016.*

[13] (1) *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Band 2,* 9 Feb 43. (2) MS #T–3–P2 (Kesselring), Pt. 2. (3) MS #C–075 (Kesselring), comments on MS #T–3 (Nehring *et al.*), Pt. 3a.

[14] Memo, *Kraeftegegenueberstellung,* 19 Feb 43, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt,* File *Tunis, 10.XI.42–2.V.43.*

[15] (1) 1st Armd Div Tank Status Rpt, 12 Feb 43, Entry 210, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) Ltr, Eisenhower to Marshall, 21 Feb 43. Copy in CinC AF Diary, Bk. V, p. A–240–2.

position to the forthcoming attack. But since its tanks had lighter armor and guns of shorter range, it would have to outnumber its opponents in a battle if its opposition was to be effective.

Allocation of Axis forces to the two successive operations remained a matter of negotiation for about a week. Rommel was inclined to exaggerate the resistance still to be expected at Gafsa, and in addition to obtaining a promise of the major part of the *21st Panzer Division,* nibbled at the rest of von Arnim's mobile armored units. Thus the blow at the southern flank of the British First Army in February originated as two separate, if related, operations under different commands. The first was an effort by von Arnim to complete his hold on the Eastern Dorsal from Faïd north to Pichon, and perhaps to push the Allies well to the west. The second was Rommel's endeavor to disperse and destroy the American II Corps in the general vicinity of Gafsa. When the first had been completed, the second could start, and von Arnim planned, after relinquishing the *21st Panzer Division,* to bring as much as possible of *10th Panzer Division* northward along the western edge of the Eastern Dorsal to gain full possession of the gaps at Fondouk el Aouareb and Pichon, and to roll up the Allied line north of Pichon. Beyond Sidi Bou Zid and Gafsa, the forces committed to these two operations were expected only to engage in reconnaissance toward Sbeïtla and Fériana, respectively.[16]

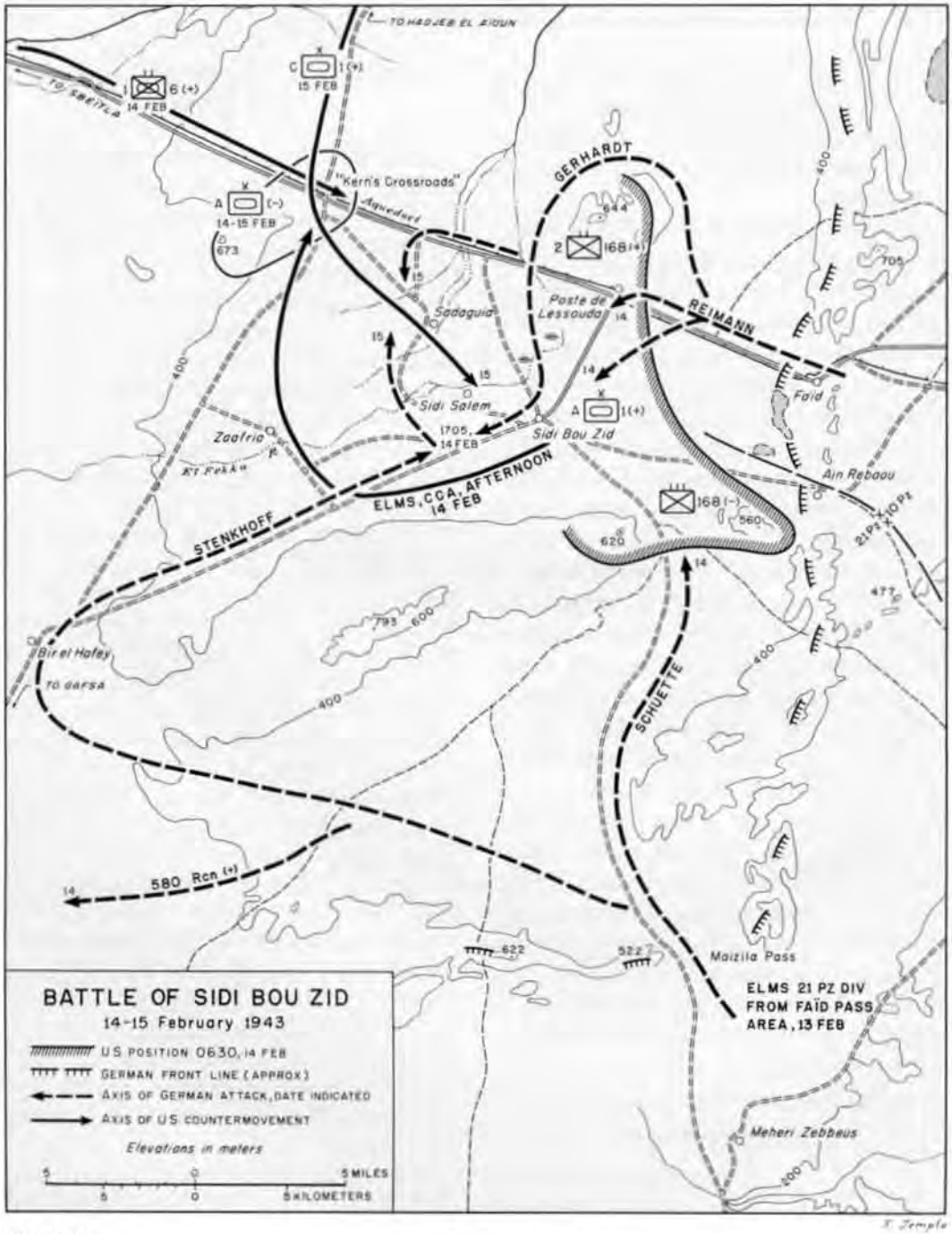
[16] (1) Rad, *Comando Supremo* to *Fifth Panzer Army* and *Panzer Army Africa,* 11 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 8, Anlage 1038.* (2) *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Band 2,* 11–13 Feb 43.

Axis Plans for Taking Sidi Bou Zid and Gafsa

The *Fifth Panzer Army's* attack against Sidi Bou Zid was placed under the direct command of General von Arnim's chief of staff, General Heinz Ziegler, and designated Operation *FRUEHLINGSWIND* on 8 February. (*Map 11*) The *10th Panzer Division* (now commanded by General von Broich) was ordered to move from its position near Kairouan by night marches, assemble east of Faïd pass, get through before daybreak, and launch an attack along the Faïd–Sbeïtla road.[17] The nonmotorized units of the *21st Panzer Division* (Colonel Hildebrandt), which had been stationed near Faïd since 31 January, would participate in a second phase of the attack against Sidi Bou Zid; but the division's mobile elements were to pass along the coastal side of the mountain chain to Maïzila pass, about twenty miles farther south, and then to approach Sidi Bou Zid from the south and southwest.[18] The *10th Panzer Division* organized three assault groups: groups *Gerhardt* and *Reimann,* and a reserve force. *Group Gerhardt* was to open the operation by crossing Faïd pass, then swinging to the northwest around Djebel Lessouda (644) to neutralize its defenders and to bar intervention from the direction of Sbeïtla or Hadjeb el Aïoun. This force was built around the *7th Panzer Regiment* (less a battalion), and a battalion of the *69th Panzer Grenadier Regiment. Group Reimann* was to proceed along the highway

[17] Von Broich took command when General Fischer was killed on 1 February by an Italian mine. *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB IV,* 1 Feb 43.

[18] FO, *Fifth Panzer Army, Nr. 260/43,* 8 Feb 43, in *21st Panzer Div, Ia, KTB–Anlagen, Nr. 9, 1.I.–31.III.43, Afrika* (cited hereafter as *21st Panzer Div, KTB Anlagen, Band 9*).


TO HADJEB EL AIOUN
TO SBEITLA
6 (+)
14 FEB
C
1 (+)
15 FEB
"Kern's Crossroads"
Aqueduct
A
(-)
14-15 FEB
673
GERHARDT
644
2
168 (+)
705
Sadaguia
Poste de Lessouda
REIMANN
Faid
Sidi Salem
1705, 14 FEB
Sidi Bou Zid
A
1 (+)
Zaafria
Ain Reboou
ELMS, CCA, AFTERNOON 14 FEB
STENKHOFF
168 (-)
560
620
21 Pz
10 Pz
477
793
600
Bir el Hafey
TO GAFSA
400
SCHUETTE
580 Rcn (+)
622
522
Maizila Pass
ELMS 21 PZ DIV FROM FAÏD PASS AREA, 13 FEB
Meheri Zebbeus
BATTLE OF SIDI BOU ZID
14-15 February 1943
U.S. POSITION 0630, 14 FEB
GERMAN FRONT LINE (APPROX)
AXIS OF GERMAN ATTACK, DATE INDICATED
AXIS OF U.S. COUNTERMOVEMENT
Elevations in meters
5 0 5 MILES
5 0 5 KILOMETERS
T. Temple

MAP 11

from Faïd to Sbeïtla toward the southeastern corner of Djebel Lessouda, and then to turn southwesterly for an attack on Sidi Bou Zid. This aggregation included the *86th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* (less a battalion) and a company of heavy Tiger tanks, plus one platoon of 88-mm. dual-purpose guns, as well as supplementary infantry, engineers, and artillery. The reserve (*Kampfgruppe Lang*) consisted of the *10th Motorcycle Battalion* reinforced by armored engineers, an antitank gun platoon and two 88-mm. dual-purpose gun detachments. From the hills east of Faïd, most of the artillery of both the *10th* and *21st Panzer Divisions* would be employed to support the infantry attack.[19]

The *21st Panzer Division* was organized for the operation into two combat teams: *Kampfgruppe Schuette* (with *Headquarters, 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment*) and *Kampfgruppe Stenkhoff* (with *Headquarters, 5th Panzer Regiment*). The core of each was a battalion of tanks, reinforced with armored infantry, supporting artillery, and flak. Schuette was to open Maïzila pass for the main body of the division, and turn north against Sidi Bou Zid. While this secondary attack was driving the Allied troops back to the village and containing them there, Stenkhoff's group reinforced by a second battalion of tanks, was to execute a wide flanking maneuver. This move would take his force as far west as Bir el Hafey, about 25 miles cross country from Maïzila pass. During this move, whose difficulty was by no means underestimated by General Ziegler, Colonel Stenkhoff's group would be protected on the southern flank by the *580th Reconnaissance Battalion* (reinforced). From Bir el Hafey, Stenkhoff was to swing to the northeast and bear down on Sidi Bou Zid. This maneuver, if executed in time, would enable Stenkhoff's group to co-operate with units of the *10th Panzer Division, Group Schuette,* and nonmobile elements located at Aïn Rebaou pass, closing a ring around the Allied force in Sidi Bou Zid. A force would be sent to clear the Allies from Djebel Garet Hadid (620) in order to deny its usefulness for observation. If the rather exacting schedule of the operation could be met by the *21st Panzer Division,* Combat Command A (reinforced), 1st Armored Division, would be caught and annihilated.[20]

The other operation, that against Gafsa, was planned and conducted by the *German Africa Corps (DAK)* staff. The *Kampfgruppe DAK* which they assembled was a composite German-Italian force in division strength consisting of infantry and armored units supported by artillery, flak, and miscellaneous other detachments. It was placed under the command of Colonel Freiherr Kurt von Liebenstein, formerly commanding officer of the *164th Light Africa Division.*[21] *Kampfgruppe DAK* was to move against Gafsa from the southeast. The elements approaching it from Gabès would be joined by mobile Italians at their station near El Guettar. Mobile elements would be drawn from the *21st Panzer Division* operat-

[19] FO, *10th Panzer Div,* 9 Feb 43, and supplement, 12 Feb 43, in *21st Panzer Div, KTB Anlagen, Band 9.*

[20] (1) FO, *21st Panzer Div, Nr. 102/43,* 12 Feb 43, in *21st Panzer Div, KTB, Anlagen, Band 9.* (2) *Gefechtsbericht ueber die Kampfhandlungen im Abschnitt Faïd vom 13.–18.II.43* (cited hereafter as *Gefechtsbericht Faïd*), in *Fifth Panzer Army, Anlage zum Kriegstagebuch IV A* (cited hereafter as *KTB, Anlagen, Band IV A*), *1.–26.II.43, Anlage 117.*

[21] (1) *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Band 2,* 10 Feb 43. (2) MS # D–124, *Beitrag zum Vorstoss ueber Gafsa gegen den Kasserine-Pass* (Generalleutnant Freiherr Kurt von Liebenstein).



37-MM ANTITANK GUN (M3A1) AND CREW *wait for the expected enemy column through Faïd Pass, 14 February 1943.*

ing in the area of Sidi Bou Zid to reinforce the *DAK* for its drive on Gafsa. The objective was the Gafsa basin, but Rommel in persistent adherence to his original proposals had in mind the possibility of exploiting as far as Tébessa.[22]

On 13 February, Rommel, von Arnim, and General Hans Seidemann, the Luftwaffe commander, met General Ziegler and his division commanders at La Fauconnerie east of Faïd pass to review plans, confirm boundaries, and reach full understanding of respective roles and missions. Rommel was inclined to be pessimistic about what lay ahead of the force approaching Gafsa, but von Arnim was confident that the bulk of the American forces would be drawn to his front, and that Gafsa would be lightly held. Ziegler again assured Rommel that the *21st Panzer Division* would be detached at the first possible moment to reinforce von Liebenstein. Then Ziegler and Colonel Heinz Pomptow, his operations officer, went to the hills overlooking Faïd village and the Sidi Bou Zid plain for a final reconnaissance before the attack.[23]

The Battle of Sidi Bou Zid, 14 February

Combat Command A was waiting for the enemy column which came through Faïd pass at 0630, 14 February. Plans had been prepared to cope with possible enemy moves through that defile or through the gaps immediately north or south of it. In compliance with the II Corps orders of 11 February, a "Lessouda Force" of infantry, tanks, artillery, and tank destroyers, commanded by Lt.

[22] (1) Rpt, *German-Italian Panzer Army* to *Comando Supremo*, 16 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1081/4.* The Gafsa operation was termed *Unternehmen MORGENLUFT.* (2) FO, *Panzer Army Africa, Nr. 1,* in *Panzer Army Africa, Anlagenband 8, Anlage 1028/1.*

[23] (1) *21st Panzer Div, KTB,* 13 Feb 43. (2) *Gefechtsbericht Faïd.*

Col. John K. Waters, executive officer of the 1st Armored Regiment, had been stationed on Djebel Lessouda, north of Sidi Bou Zid.[24] Engineers assisted in preparing defensive positions on the hill. The force sent out patrols each night. The tanks, tank destroyers, and artillery occupied varying positions on the flat during the day, and retired after dark to others within the defensive area where they remained until just before daylight. The Lessouda Force was expected to block an attack until a mobile armored reserve of about forty tanks (3d Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment) under Lt. Col. Louis V. Hightower, stationed nearer Sidi Bou Zid than the Lessouda Force, counterattacked. An artillery-infantry observation post on Djebel Lessouda was in communication with the command posts of both Lessouda Force and Combat Command A, 1st Armored Division, in Sidi Bou Zid.

A similar arrangement was made by the 168th Combat Team (less 1st and 2d Battalions) and a platoon of the 109th Engineers on Djebel Ksaïra (560), under Colonel Drake. The 91st Field Artillery Battalion (less Battery B) and 2d Battalion, 17th Field Artillery Regiment (155-mm. howitzers), were placed astride the Sidi Bou Zid—Aïn Rebaou road at the base of Djebel Ksaïra, where they were protected by elements of the 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion (SP). From an observation post there, watchers could note enemy activity along the road to Meheri Zebbeus. On 13 February, a strong northwest wind smothered all sounds except of tank motors to the east after dark, but though faint they were heard and reported. All units were therefore alerted and trains were ordered back to Sbeïtla. At 2130, Colonel Waters conferred at Combat Command A's command post in Sidi Bou Zid with General McQuillin and Col. Peter C. Hains, III, commanding officer of the 1st Armored Regiment. Waters then returned to Djebel Lessouda to await the enemy.[25]

Elements of the *86th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* and the *7th Panzer Regiment* began emerging from Faïd pass onto the misty plain about 0630, 14 February. As they started northwestward toward Djebel Lessouda they encountered some of the patrolling tanks of Company G, 1st Armored Regiment, under command of Maj. Norman Parsons.[26] Early in the action Major Parsons' tank was knocked out, and with it all radio communications with Colonel Waters was destroyed at a time when light was not yet sufficient for direct observation that far from Djebel Lessouda. The prepared artillery barrage on Faïd pass was consequently not requested. But the Americans soon recognized that a tank battle was in progress near the pass, the proportions of which could not yet be appreciated. "To clear up the situation," Combat Command A sent Companies H and I, 1st Armored Regiment, and most of Company A, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion (75-mm. guns), up the road from Sidi Bou Zid to Poste de Lessouda. As the men got started, the first of several Axis air strikes in the area that day began. Then they were

[24] It consisted of the 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry (reinforced) (less Company E); Company G, and Reconnaissance Company, 1st Armored Regiment; Battery B, 91st Field Artillery; and one heavy platoon of Company A, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion.

[25] (1) Rpt by Col Hains, 12 Mar 43, in 1st Armd Div Hist Rcds; 1st Armd Regt AAR, 10 Jul 43; CCA 1st Armd Div AAR, 23 Jan–26 Feb 43. (2) Interv with Col Hains, 26 Apr 51.

[26] (1) See n. 24. (2) Ltr, Col Louis V. Hightower to Col Hamilton H. Howze (then G–3, 1st Armd Div), 1 Jul 46. In private possession. (3) Info supplied by Brig Gen Raymond E. McQuillin (Ret.). OCMH.

warned from Djebel Lessouda that about twenty Mark IV tanks were at Poste de Lessouda, apart from whatever force was still engaged near the pass. The American armored force under Colonel Hightower came within sight and range of the enemy a few minutes later, and was subjected to fire from what were believed to be 88-mm. guns and from perhaps as many as four Mark VI Tiger tanks. Hightower's men might have cleared up doubts concerning the strength of the enemy, but they were outranged and were unable to drive him off or destroy him.

The next discoveries reported from Djebel Lessouda were that the first engagement near the pass had ended without information of what had become of Company G, 1st Armored Regiment, and that there was movement toward the northern end of the hill by an enemy force of eighty armored vehicles and trucks. By 0900, the enemy's strength already on the western side of Djebel Lessouda was described as thirty-nine Mark IV tanks, perhaps a few Mark VI's, and mobile infantry. This force moved very slowly southward toward the road from Faïd to Sbeïtla, firing on the slopes of Djebel Lessouda as it passed. Colonel Hightower was warned of the approach of this second force which might cut him off. He redirected Company H, 1st Armored Regiment, to delay the enemy, and with Lt. Col. Charles P. Summerall, Jr.'s, 91st Field Artillery Battalion (less Battery B, which had been in the path of the first attack and was now about to be caught again, this time from the rear) opposed this strong northern prong of the enemy attack by fire and maneuver. American losses were heavy, and, in the last hour of the morning, the unequal contest ended in a withdrawal southwestward.

Heavy attacks by dive bombers and fighter-bombers between 1000 and 1100 supported ground attacks on Sidi Bou Zid from Faïd village and Aïn Rebaou pass. These ground attacks were intended to pin down General McQuillin's forces and permit the armored columns to close in from the northwest and southwest. The enemy's drive was recognized as too powerful for the defenders, but they held on under division orders as the situation deteriorated. The 2d Battalion, 17th Field Artillery, was ordered from its exposed positions east of Sidi Bou Zid to an area southwest of the village. As it moved back by batteries, enemy dive bombers repeatedly struck it and eventually destroyed it as a fighting unit.[27]

At the same time that the *10th Panzer Division* and part of the *21st Panzer Division* were preparing to attack through Faïd pass, the mobile elements of the *21st Panzer Division* had moved southward to Maïzila pass, and after darkness 13–14 February, started through it. The first elements of *Kampfgruppe Schuette* followed by the *5th Panzer Regiment* began emerging from a path through a mine field there shortly after 0600. The soft sand of the road through the pass proved hard going for the tanks and slowed the rate of advance. Reconnaissance to the north revealed no Allied threat. Indeed, no contact with Allied forces occurred until, at 0920, low-flying planes strafed one of the marching columns.[28] But at 0940, Company C, 81st Reconnaissance Battalion, reported to the 1st Armored Division that twenty unidentified vehicles were

[27] Ltr, Lt Col Henry P. Ward to Col Charles E. Hart, 16 Feb 43, in 17th FA Regtl Hist.

[28] (1) II Corps G–3 Jnl, 14 Feb 43, Entry 314. (2) 1st Lt Frank S. Sears, Supply Operations in Combat, 1 May 48. The Artillery School, Gen Instruc Dept. (3) *21st Panzer Div, KTB,* 13–17 Feb 43.

emerging from Maïzila pass, ten going west and ten north. A little later, Company A in the pass south of Djebel Matleg (477) was cut off and captured with all its vehicles.

The road from Maïzila pass to Sidi Bou Zid ran between Djebel Ksaïra on the east and Djebel Garet Hadid on the west. The elements of Colonel Drake's command which moved onto Djebel Garet Hadid during the morning attack saw an enemy force of about thirty vehicles, approaching along this road at noon, a force they had been warned to expect. They engaged it in the defile, the skirmish continuing throughout the afternoon. This column, an advance element of *Kampfgruppe Schuette* was joined by the remainder of that group late in the afternoon.[29] Meanwhile, *Group Stenkhoff,* the main force of the *21st Panzer Division,* pushed along the northern edge of Djebel Meloussi (622) under the eyes of its commander, Colonel Hildebrandt, screened to the west and south by the *580th Reconnaissance Battalion.* Progress was interrupted chiefly by muddy dips in the plain or mechanical failures in some of the vehicles. Opposition on the ground was nil.

Group Stenkhoff reached Bir el Hafey on the Gafsa–Sidi Bou Zid highway about noon, assembled, and at 1345 proceeded in force northeastward along the highway toward Sidi Bou Zid, some eighteen miles distant.

Reports of the battle filtering through from General Ward's headquarters to that of General Fredendall near Tébessa were sketchy. The successive appearance of the enemy's armored groups left total numbers in considerable doubt. The reported loss of artillery and the identification of Mark VI's among the enemy tanks brought early requests from the division for reinforcing artillery. The II Corps shifted a battery of the 68th Armored Field Artillery Battalion and two platoons of Company A, 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion, from Fériana to Sbeïtla.

General Ward at first did not consider the situation grave,[30] but when towards noon, the loss of about half the tanks of Hightower's 3d Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, was reported, along with the fact that the force south of Sidi Bou Zid was described as very substantial, it became clear that not only had Djebel Lessouda been surrounded but that Colonel Drake's troops were marooned on Djebel Ksaïra and Djebel Garet Hadid. It also became apparent that elements of McQuillin's force in and around Sidi Bou Zid were being driven out and would have to move without delay to avoid being caught on both flanks. Authorization to pull out was finally given to McQuillin early in the afternoon. By 1405, Combat Command A's command post was seven miles southwest of Sidi Bou Zid, Hightower's depleted tank force was stubbornly covering the withdrawal of Combat Command A, fighting off a threat from *Group Stenkhoff* on the southwestern flank, and Colonel Drake's infantry force by division order was necessarily left in isolation until it could be relieved by a counterattack already being planned for the next morning. It could not have withdrawn in daylight without being subjected to repeated air attack and heavy losses.[31]

[29] (1) *21st Panzer Div, KTB,* 14 Feb 43. (2) Memo, Col Drake for G–2 WD, 14 May 45, sub: Account of 168th Inf Opns 24 Dec 42–17 Feb 43. DRB AGO.

[30] Rpt by Gen Welvert, in DMC Jnl, 14 Feb 43.

[31] (1) Entries 303, 307, 309, 334, 335, and 353, in II Corps G–3 Jnl, 14 Feb 43. (2) Ltr, Col Hightower to Col Howze, 1 Jul 46. In private possession. (3) 168th Inf AAR, 12 Nov 42–15 May 43.



FAID PASS, *looking southwest.*

From division reserve near Sbeïtla, General Ward had sent the 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry (Colonel Kern), and one company of light tanks during the morning to a crossroads eleven miles northwest of Sidi Bou Zid on the Sbeïtla–Faïd road.[32] It established a protective line west of which Combat Command A could reorganize, after a cross-country retreat via Zaafria. During this withdrawal some vehicles were stalled in soft sand or in the wadies and were left behind to be salvaged after dark. Long-range artillery and tank fire harried the Americans, and some of Stenkhoff's tanks threatened to disrupt the movement by penetrating the southwestern flank. Colonel Hightower's own tank moved to this danger point, where alone it knocked out several enemy vehicles and drove off the remainder; at the very end of the engagement his tank was itself destroyed but its crew escaped. At dusk, Combat Command A, less the isolated troops of the 168th Infantry, began arriving at the rallying point near Djebel Hamra (673), where it reorganized for defense of Sbeïtla.[33] Thus, Com-

[32] This point was known thereafter to the 1st Armored Division as "Kern's Crossroads."

[33] (1) Based on AAR's of CCA 1st Armed Div, 168th Inf, 3d Bn 1st Armd Regt, 1st Bn 6th Armd Inf, and Co A 701st TD Bn. (2) M. Sgt. Clarence W. Coley, A Day With the 1st Armored Division, 6 Jul 51, in George F. Howe, *The Battle History of the 1st Armored Division* (Washington, 1954), pp. 150–53. (3) Info supplied by Gen McQuillin, 13 Jan 51. OCMH.



SIDI BOU ZID, *looking northeast.*

bat Command A, which might have been pursued and perhaps destroyed, was able to get away.

At 1705, *Group Stenkhoff* established contact with elements of the *10th Panzer Division* west of Sidi Bou Zid. By nightfall, that village was firmly held by the Germans. Its former Allied defenders had withdrawn toward Sbeïtla or had been caught and isolated on Djebel Lessouda, Djebel Ksaïra, and Djebel Garet Hadid. On the plain west of Sidi Bou Zid, abandoned, burning, or broken-down vehicles marked the route of withdrawal. Combat Command A's losses had been heavy: 6 killed, 22 wounded, 134 missing, 44 tanks, all but 2 tank destroyer guns, 9 of the authorized 105-mm. pieces of the 91st Armored Field Artillery Battalion, and all the 155-mm. howitzers of the 2d Battalion, 17th Field Artillery.[34]

At 1530, General Ziegler considered that his initial mission had been achieved. He ordered the *10th Panzer Division* to recon-

[34] (1) Rpt by Col Hains, 12 Mar 43, and Rpt by Col Hightower, 1 Jul 46, in 1st Armd Div Hist Rcds. (2) *10th Panzer Div, Ic, Taetigkeitsbericht,* 14 Feb 43, lists the following Allied losses: 71 prisoners, 40 tanks, 7 armored personnel carriers, 15 self-propelled mounts, 1 antitank gun, 9 machine guns, 1 prime mover, 4 trucks, and 18 other vehicles. (3) The initial estimate of Combat Command A's losses in personnel was 62 officers and 1,536 enlisted men killed, wounded, or missing in action (see Msg, G–3 1st Armd Div to G–3 II Corps, 0745, 16 Feb 43, Entry 116 in II Corps G–3 Jnl). Of these, 573 were 1st Armored Division troops (see 1st Armd Div G–3 Jnl, 14 Feb 43).



SPAHIS WITHDRAWING FROM THE SIDI BOU ZID AREA, *14 February 1943.*

noiter aggressively to Hadjeb el Aïoun, twenty-five miles north of Sidi Bou Zid, the *21st Panzer Division* (reinforced) to assemble for an expeditious move against Gafsa, probably starting at noon next day, and both divisions to employ some of their nonmobile units in mopping up around Sidi Bou Zid. The fact that the tenacious defense of Djebel Ksaïra and Djebel Garet Hadid by the Americans was proving troublesome, and the possibility of an American counterattack deterred *Group Ziegler* from dispersing to any great extent.[35]

Allied divisional reserves at Sbeïtla consisted of the light tank battalion (1st) of the 13th Armored Regiment at about half-strength; the 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry; Company B, 16th Armored Engineers; and two antiaircraft guns of Battery B, 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion (SP). The French units in the area were not equipped with weapons suited to successful counterattack on an enemy who employed Mark IV and Mark VI tanks, 88-mm. dual-purpose guns, and other modern arms. For that matter, neither were the Americans, although they were far more fortunate in their armament and much more mobile than the French.

Allied Preparations for Counterattack

To make the next day's counterattack, General Ward brought south from Hadjeb el Aïoun Colonel Stack's Combat Command C, and via II Corps got First Army to release to him the 2d Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment (Lt. Col. James D. Alger),

[35] *Gefechtsbericht Faïd.*

from Combat Command B near Maktar. The arrangements were completed shortly after noon, 14 February. Alger's battalion took to the road that afternoon using the new twenty-two-mile route between El Ala and Hadjeb el Aïoun which had been constructed by American Engineers.

The enemy was much stronger than the Americans realized. Among other indications of their misapprehension was the small size of the reinforcement requested. General Welvert emphasized to the Chief of Staff, French XIX Corps, that all of Combat Command B should be sent to Sbeïtla and early on 14 February, in view of what seemed to him the slowness of II Corps' decisions, tried to expedite action at General Anderson's headquarters through French channels.[36] But First Army would not release Combat Command B from Maktar for commitment near Sbeïtla even on the basis of the situation as estimated late on 14 February. No unit of the *10th Panzer Division* had been identified in the Sidi Bou Zid attack. The total number of tanks, computed at from 90 to 130, could be those of the *21st Panzer Division* and the separate *190th Panzer Battalion* only, without including any from the *10th Panzer Division.* If that calculation was correct, the Allies reasoned, the *10th Panzer Division* was remaining opposite the French XIX Corps for an attack there, and Combat Command B would be needed in the area. Indeed, it was decided that Alger's battalion would have to be replaced, a requirement which First Army was happily able to meet because it had anticipated some such need and on the previous day had called back the 16/5 Lancers Regiment from Ebba Ksour, where it was engaged in exchanging old tanks for new.[37]

General Eisenhower left II Corps headquarters late in the morning of 14 February and with Truscott and others drove to Constantine, sight-seeing at Timgad en route. The word of an attack at Sidi Bou Zid was not believed to indicate a major offensive. But as news came to the AFHQ advance command post on the next two days, General Eisenhower participated in the decision to hold Allied strength in central Tunisia and to evacuate Gafsa. The enemy's power and apparent intentions indicated that Gafsa could not be successfully defended but that there was time for an orderly withdrawal spread out over two successive nights. All supplies and transportation equipment could be removed and the place booby-trapped and mined. First Army's orders to bring back the French on the first night and the Americans on the second were questioned by II Corps on the ground that secrecy could not be maintained and that the enemy would interfere with the second night's operations.

The actual evacuation of Gafsa was accomplished during the night of 14–15 February, a night of rather confused and excited activity, especially on the part of civilians who could remember the brief Axis occupation of the preceding November. The troops pulled back as far as Fériana. The medical services of the 51st Medical Battalion and 48th Surgical Hospital moved farther back.

[36] (1) DMC Jnl, 14 Feb 43. (2) Phone Convs, Fredendall to Ward, 1250 and 1305, 14 Feb 43, Entries 318 and 330; Phone Conv, Anderson to Fredendall, 1300, 14 Feb 43, Entry 329; Rad, Adv First Army to II Corps, 1322, 14 Feb 43, Entry 346. II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[37] (1) Phone Conv, Col Arnold with Col Williams, 1900, 14 Feb 43, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (3) Msg, Eisenhower to CCS (Review 30), 15 Feb 43, NAF 149. (4) Adv First Army Sitrep, 1700, 15 Feb 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 97.

The railroad bridge north of Gafsa was prematurely demolished before all the rolling stock had been removed; it was therefore taken west to Metlaoui where it was concealed in a tunnel. In the old Kasba of the abandoned town six tons of French ammunition were blown up, unfortunately damaging adjacent buildings and injuring their native occupants.[38] Last to leave Gafsa was the 1st Ranger Battalion. The movement to Fériana was covered on the east by Squadrons B and D of the 1st Derbyshire Yeomanry.

While the U.S. II Corps pulled in its southwestern flank from Gafsa and extracted reinforcements from north of Sbeïtla, its northern boundary was shifted so that after midnight, 14–15 February, Thala (north of Kasserine), Sbiba (north of Sbeïtla), and Fondouk el Aouareb gap, all fell in the area of General Koeltz's Corps.[39] First Army suspended all scheduled reliefs of French units and arranged to cover the gap between Djebel Trozza (997) and Djebel el Abeïd (697), south of El Ala, by the U.S. 133d Combat Team, and to block the road leading into Sbiba from the east with a French force, the 1st Battalion, 1st Algerian Infantry, and with artillery, tanks, and antitank guns. East of Kasserine village, the 19th Combat Engineers (Col. Anderson T. W. Moore) began to arrive that night to organize a defense line.[40]

Late on 14 February General Fredendall received the following instructions from First Army:

> As regards action in the Sidi Bou Zid area, concentrate tomorrow on clearing up situation there and destroying enemy. Thereafter collect strong mobile force in Sbeitla area ready for action in any direction. Press on with defenses as ordered . . . 7 February. . . .[41]

The decision to counterattack with Combat Command C, reinforced by the 2d Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, had been adopted before this optimistic directive was received. During the following morning, while the counterattack was being launched, General Fredendall's order to General Ward specified:

> Desire you carry out plan to withdraw 168th Infantry from positions on Djebel Lessouda and Djebel Ksaira. Place 168th Infantry on new position Djebel Hamra. Details of withdrawal left to your judgment but should be designed for maximum security of infantry withdrawing.[42]

General Ward defined Colonel Stack's mission in the following terms:

> MISSION TO COMBAT COMMAND C
>
> This force will move south, and by fire and maneuver destroy the enemy armored forces which have threatened our hold on the Sbeitla area. It will so conduct its maneuver as to aid in the withdrawal of our forces in the

[38] (1) Ltr, Eisenhower to Marshall, 16 Feb 43. Copy in WDCSA 381 Africa. (2) Msg O–409, Adv First Army to II Corps, 14 Feb 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 96. (3) Msg, CG II Corps to CG First Army, 0035, 15 Feb 43, Entry 2, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (4) Adv First Army Sitrep, 1700, 15 Feb 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 97. (5) Memo, Brig Whiteley for G–2 and G–3 AFHQ, containing Phone Conv, Whiteley with Brig C. V. McNabb, 1850, 14 Feb 43. AFHQ Micro Job 26, Reel 71 Spec. (6) DMC Jnl, 14 Feb 43. (7) II Corps AAR, 2 May 43, par. 5. (8) 175th FA Bn War Diary, 14–15 Feb 43. (9) Msg, II Corps Surgeon to G–4 II Corps, 1950, 14 Feb 43, Entry 386, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (10) Rpt by Capt John D. Upton, in 19th Engr Regt (C) Hist Rcds, Oct 42–Jan 44. (11) Interv with Brig Gen Frederic B. Butler, 11 Jan 50.

[39] Msg, II Corps to CG 1st Armd Div, 2010, 14 Feb 43, Entry 369, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[40] (1) XIX Corps Jnl, 14 Feb 43. (2) 19th Engr Regt (C), Hist Rcds, Oct 42–Jan 44.

[41] Msg O–409, Adv First Army to II Corps, 14 Feb 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 96.

[42] Msg, CG II Corps to CG 1st Armd Div, 1120, 15 Feb 43, Entry 17, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

vicinity of Dj Ksaira, eventually withdrawing to the area north of Dj Hamra for further action.[43]

Colonel Stack's orders had to be prepared with the aid of two small-scale maps of the anticipated battle area, and in lieu of adequate reconnaissance by Stack's own attacking force, of supplementary data provided by two officers of the Reconnaissance Company, 1st Armored Regiment, and by Colonel Hains, all of whom had been in the preceding day's battle. Stack understood the enemy's strength to consist of forty tanks north of Sidi Bou Zid and fifteen to twenty tanks south of it, belonging to enemy units not yet identified. By pushing a column through or beyond Sidi Bou Zid, he might succeed in screening the withdrawal of the southernmost American groups under Lt. Col. John H. Van Vliet, Jr., on Djebel Ksaïra and Colonel Drake on Djebel Garet Hadid. The Lessouda Force under Colonel Waters could be assisted in a subsequent and much easier operation.[44]

The Counterattack at Sidi Bou Zid, 15 February

Combat Command C, including Alger's 2d Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, reinforced, after its arrival from Maktar, marched south from Hadjeb el Aïoun on 15 February over a fairly direct road to an assembly area northeast of Djebel Hamra.[45] Leading elements reached the assembly area by 0945, but the column was strafed by enemy planes near the end of its march and did not complete reorganizing until just after noon, when it began the attack.

From Colonel Stack's command post on Djebel Hamra, the battlefield stretched out below with unimpeded view for miles through the clear dry atmosphere of a sunny afternoon. Even through field glasses, Sidi Bou Zid, about 13 miles distant, was a tiny spot of dark hued evergreens and white houses behind which rose the hazy slopes of Djebel Ksaïra. At the left was Djebel Lessouda, toward which the road from Sbeïtla extended as straight as a taut string, and from which Colonel Waters radioed reports of what could be seen from its heights. On the right, the road from Bir el Hafey slanting northeastward to Sidi Bou Zid could be identified, and roughly parallel with it, the long ridge of Djebel el Kebar (793). There was considerable mirage. The dips and folds of the plain were for the most part gradual, but several steep-sided deeper wadies creased it in general from north to south. The monotonous brown-gray of the landscape was marked at various points by patches of darker cactus, by the geometric figures of cultivated fields and orchards, and by small clusters of low, block-shaped white buildings. At 1240 the attacking formation started over this expanse with great precision until its vehicles were reduced by distance to the size of insects, and obscured by heavy dust.

[43] Original in CCC 1st Armd Div Opns Jnl, Feb 43.

[44] Msg, Lt Col Hamilton H. Howze to CCC 1st Armd Div, 1350, 15 Feb 43, and Phone Conv, Cols Williams, Hamlett, and Arnold, 1900, 14 Feb 43, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[45] For the counterattack of 15 February 1943 at Sidi Bou Zid, Combat Command C consisted of: the 6th Armored Infantry (less the 1st and 2d Battalions); the 2d Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, Company G, 13th Armored Regiment; the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion (less Companies A and C); the 68th Field Artillery Battalion (less Battery A); the 1st Platoon, Company D, 16th Armored Engineer Battalion; the 1st Platoon, 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion (SP); a detachment of Company B, 13th Armored Regiment; and Company A, 47th Armored Medical Battalion. See II Corps G–3 Jnl, 1420, 15 Feb 43, Entry 28.

In the lead were the tanks. They started slowly southeastward in column of companies, led by Company D, followed by Company F, the assault guns, and Company E in that order. Tank destroyers were grouped on each wing. The artillery and then the infantry in half-tracks followed. At 1340 a formation of ten to twelve enemy fighters and nine enemy bombers swept over the column for the first time, strafing and bombing it near Djebel Hamra. An hour later the Germans dive-bombed Sidi Bou Zid well in advance of the American force, and at 1630 subjected the infantry to another bombing just as it passed through the artillery positions.[46]

While Colonel Stack's force was delayed by enemy air attack, the Germans found time to prepare for their scheme of defense. Three companies of *Group Stenkhoff* were to strike the American south flank while elements of *Group Gerhardt,* from a position northwest of Sidi Salem, were to envelop Combat Command C from the north flank. Three heavy and two light batteries began firing briskly on the attacking force after withholding fire until it had neared its objective and its tanks were all in range. Stukas joined the ground forces in opposing the American advance. Enemy planes were also used to divert attention from a slow shift by elements of the *5th Panzer Regiment* aimed at turning the southern flank.[47]

A steady stream of radio reports from Djebel Lessouda and Djebel Ksaïra to Combat Command C via the 1st Armored Division described enemy movements and indicated that the Axis forces, although large, were considerably dispersed. Colonel Stack was urged to push on aggressively while he retained this advantage.[48] Colonel Alger's tanks could cross the series of wadies in the path of attack only at a few points. Toward these crossings his armored units converged in temporary concentrations before again spreading out in attack formation. While Company D, 1st Armored Regiment, was reconnoitering to find a way across the first great ditch, at a point a little beyond the village of Sadaguïa on the left flank, a tank destroyer platoon entered that village and there the enemy's first resistance, a Stuka attack, knocked it out. The tanks, with one exception, crossed the first wadi successfully and after fanning out resumed the advance toward the second. As they arrived at the one good crossing point there, the enemy opened up with air burst and then with antitank artillery fire. On the northern flank, an enemy battery including four 88-mm. and two 47-mm. antitank guns had been waiting in concealment. Before their fire took effect, they were observed and overrun by the advance platoon of Company D, 1st Armored Regiment. The air burst, coming from artillery pieces emplaced on the shoulders of Djebel el Kebar and other vantage points to the southeast, forced the tank crews to "button up" and to continue movement with restricted vision. While Company E, in reserve, remained near the second wadi, Companies D and F, and the assault guns pushed on. Batteries B and C, 68th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, took up firing positions and began counterbattery fire, or shelled enemy tanks, in response to calls from forward observers in the leading American vehicles. As the infantry began to pass through the artillery, an air attack struck the area and threw the troops into some confusion.

[46] CCC 1st Armd Div Jnl, 15 Feb 43.

[47] (1) *Gefechtsbericht Faïd,* 15 Feb 43. (2) Interv with Col Hains, 26 Apr 51.

[48] Msg, CG 1st Armd Div to CCC, 1422, 15 Feb 43, in CCC Jnl.

The tanks arriving at the third wadi came under much heavier fire, especially on the southern flank. Company D on the north was able to send tanks into the village of Sidi Salem, where they shot up the buildings and a motor pool to the east, and stopped the progress of an enemy tank force trying to pass the village's northern edge. But when Company D tried to emerge northeast of the village, heavy fire from the north drove the tanks back to cover. Company F moved toward the area south of Sidi Bou Zid along a route in defilade pointed out by Colonel Alger. Alger's tank, while heading back toward Sidi Salem to rejoin Company D, was knocked out. The radio operator was killed but the others survived, only to be captured. Company E, in the meantime, came forward and pressed toward the village and then, about 1630, encountered the spearhead of an enemy armored force striking from the northern flank. Company F became involved at about the same time against a similar thrust from the south. On either flank, the enemy sent additional enveloping forces. That at the south escaped detection until it had reached a threatening position from which it was finally driven off by Battery C, 68th Armored Artillery Battalion. The threat nonetheless remained and caused the attacking American forces to start a hurried withdrawal. The enemy's slowly advancing column, reinforced with Tiger tanks, heading toward the deep northern flank in the area of Kern's Crossroads, was reported from Djebel Lessouda in time for Combat Command C to commit its reserve company of medium tanks (Company G, 13th Armored Regiment) to try to intercept it. The company took a course too far to the northwest and missed the enemy, who turned southward into the battle area, thus avoiding also some long-range fire from the 91st Armored Field Artillery Battalion near Djebel Hamra.

At 1645, Colonel Stack reported to General Ward that it had become doubtful that Combat Command C would reach Djebel Ksaïra before sundown. A few minutes later, when Colonel Alger was asked by Stack to report his situation and to state what help he could use, he replied laconically: "Still pretty busy. Situation in hand. No answer to second question. Further details later." Then his radio went silent. His further details were reserved until the year 1945, when he was released from imprisonment and could supply an account based on the recollections which he and his fellow captives from the battalion had shared during the intervening period. By 1740, the armored infantry was escaping the threatened envelopment. The tank battalion, whose losses were already severe, started back through a gantlet of enemy antitank fire from which only four emerged that evening. A few dismounted crews also escaped. After darkness had fallen, the 68th Armored Field Artillery Battalion (less Battery A), marched from the battlefield where it had been briefly cut off at dusk, leaving the enemy in possession and many fires blazing. The Germans energetically salvaged both their own equipment and that left behind by the Americans, but two months later, more than forty rusting tanks were found when the Allies recovered control over that region.[49] Thus on the second

[49] (1) CCC 1st Armd Div Jnl, 15 Feb 43. (2) *10th Panzer Div, Ic, Taetigkeitsbericht*, 15 Feb 43. (3) Ltr, Col Drake to Gen Ward, 15 Jan 51. OCMH. (4) Interv with Col Hains, 26 Apr 51. (5) Rpt by Lt Col James D. Alger, The Attack on Sidi Bou Zid by the 2d Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, 15 Feb 43. In private possession.

successive day, a small American armored force had been driven from the battlefield with heavy losses. The estimate of the damage inflicted by Combat Command C, 1st Armored Division, upon the enemy was thirteen Mark IV tanks, five 88-mm. and ten other artillery pieces damaged or destroyed, and upwards of fifty men killed. The 2d Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, on 16 February reported 15 officers and 298 enlisted men missing in action and one officer wounded and evacuated.[50]

The Allies were slow to realize that they had lost another tank battalion. The enemy's motor pool near Sidi Bou Zid continued to burn into the night, but the Americans interpreted it as a group of German tanks. "We might have walloped them or they might have walloped us," reported General Ward to II Corps as late as 2230 hours that evening. Through messages dropped by air on Djebel Lessouda before darkness, he had, however, ordered Colonel Waters to get his force back during the night.[51] The enemy had been surprised at the weakness of the counterattack and remained alert for a second wave of attack. He knew exactly from captured orders the units which had been fighting thus far.[52] The Allies, however, were maintaining a defense line near Kern's Crossroads east of Sbeïtla and reorganizing for defense, as already noted. In fact, at the highest levels a decision of the greatest moment to subsequent operations had been made during the day.

[50] (1) Msg, CO CCC to G–3 1st Armd Div, 1348, 16 Feb 43, in CCC 1st Armd Div Jnl. (2) The Germans themselves claimed to have salvaged every tank of their own, but listed as American matériel captured or destroyed: 39 tanks, 17 armored personnel carriers, 4 antitank guns, 3 self-propelled mounts, 8 machine guns, 1 105-mm. howitzer, and about 100 vehicles. *10th Panzer Div, Ic, Taetigkeitsbericht,* 15 Feb 43. (3) The estimate at 0325, 16 February, by G–3, 1st Armored Division, was 46 medium and 2 light tanks, 130 vehicles, and 9 self-propelled 105's. II Corps G–3 Jnl, 16 Feb 43; Entries 76 and 87. (4) See sketch map, Howe, *The Battle History of the 1st Armored Division,* p. 164.

[51] Phone Conv, Gen Ward with Col Akers, 2220, 15 Feb 43, Entry 65, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[52] (1) Lt Col James D. Alger, The Attack on Sidi Bou Zid by the 2d Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, 15 Feb 43. In private possession. (2) *10th Panzer Div, Ic, Taetigkeitsbericht,* 15 Feb 43.

CHAPTER XXII

The Enemy Drives Back the Allied Southern Flank

The Decision To Fall Back to the West

On 15 February, General Anderson concluded that his attempt to hold onto forward positions had been too ambitious, that "a very exposed southern flank" existed in the light of current and impending operations, and that the whole Allied force was in danger of being outflanked and cut off from the south. The threat could be covered by strong armored forces in the Sbeïtla–Sbiba areas, but since U.S. II Corps would have "other responsibilities to the south," such a concentration of armor would be impracticable.

"I feel therefore," he wrote to General Eisenhower, "that it is wise to consider in good time whether we should not voluntarily withdraw to the main ridge of the Grande Dorsale from Djebel Bargou (1266) southwards, linking up with Kef el Ahmar and down to the Sbeitla area." He also pointed out that an early withdrawal intact would be preferable to a costly effort to hold the Pichon area and the Eastern Dorsal. On the other hand, he continued, "I think it is essential that we hold the Grande Dorsale itself, and I am prepared to fight all out to insure this." He stated further that to hold the Grande Dorsale might not be possible if the Allies first lost heavily while being driven out of their easterly positions. (*See Map 10.*)

The decision was submitted to the commander in chief as a matter of major policy and received his approval.[1] First Army issued a warning to II Corps at 1700, 15 February, that early withdrawal had been determined and that General Anderson would send instructions governing the methods to be employed to cover the withdrawal and to establish the new line. In the meantime, the first task of II Corps would be to extricate the infantry from the hills near Sidi Bou Zid, and then to pull back to positions insuring the security of Sbeïtla, Kasserine, and Fériana, while retaining a mobile reserve capable of operating to the northeast, east, south, and southwest. First Army expected II Corps to be prepared to engage the enemy should he move west or southwest from Fondouk el Aouareb-Pichon gap, or northward toward Hadjeb el Aïoun from the Faïd area.[2]

The decision to fall back to the Western Dorsal was a hard one. It meant the abandonment of a forward base for both American and French units at Sbeïtla, and of the

[1] Msg O–420, Anderson to Eisenhower, 15 Feb 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 100.

[2] Dir, CG First Army to CG II Corps, 1700, 15 Feb 43, Entry 121, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

newly constructed air base at Thélepte. It required hasty improvisation of defenses at a number of passes in the western chain. It required troops only recently brought eastward to meet the severe test of large-scale retirement. An orderly withdrawal under enemy pressure would require valor, skill, and good leadership. On the other hand, the decision was bound, if satisfactorily executed, to make the enemy exert a prodigious effort if he was to obtain from it any further advantage. With what the Allies estimated as an unfavorable Axis supply situation, and with the British Eighth Army's advance against the Mareth Position scheduled to occur soon, the enemy would be obliged to gain his successes quickly. To fight his way through the Western Dorsal could be made very costly to him and might, indeed, be prevented. Nevertheless, General Anderson's decision to commit his reserves to cover the withdrawal in the critical area on the southern flank left him without the means to make, as General Eisenhower had suggested, any diversionary attack in the north in order to lighten the pressure which the enemy could exert from Pichon to Fériana.[3]

During the next night, 15–16 February, the force under attack on Djebel Lessouda (644) attempted to escape the encirclement. A substantial group infiltrated through the enemy's outpost line before daylight. Before dawn, 231 succeeded in reaching Djebel Hamra (673), bringing with them some enemy prisoners. Others got through to the north or south. Three American officers and 58 men were captured at once and later a few more, including Colonel Waters.[4] The troops still stranded in two groups on Djebel Ksaïra (560) and Djebel Garet Hadid (620) were kept under relentless attack until, thristy and hungry, they had been crowded on 16 February into limited areas on each hill.[5] (*See Map 11.*) They were ordered to withdraw during the night of 16–17 February. Each force destroyed all of its weapons and equipment except what could be carried to advantage. The men worked their way down the slopes and out across ploughed fields onto the plain, continuing toward Djebel Hamra, about fifteen miles away, in complete darkness. In a weakened condition, they jettisoned heavy pack weapons but were still a few miles short of the hills at dawn. Before they could leave the plain, they were observed and pursued by motorized troops, who circled out of range, cut them down with heavy machine gun fire, drove most of those surviving into a large cactus patch, and eventually captured all but a few. Both groups had similar experiences. About 800 prisoners were taken in the first group and 600, including Colonel Drake, in the second.

The Axis Attack Pauses

The *Kampfgruppe* from the *German Africa Corps* which Rommel had placed under command of Colonel von Liebenstein approached Gafsa from Gabès cautiously, for Rommel was disturbed by his lack of reserves, convinced that a serious reverse would have catastrophic consequences, and still inclined to overestimate the Allied

[3] Msg 254, Truscott to Eisenhower, 16 Feb 43, reporting views of Maj Gen Sir Richard L. McCreery, CofS designate of 18 A Gp. AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

[4] (1) CCC 1st Armd Div Jnl, 16 Feb 43. (2) *10th Panzer Div, Ic, Taetigkeitsbericht,* 16 Feb 43.

[5] (1) Report of Activities of the 168th Infantry in the Sidi Bou Zid Area, 14–17 February 1943, 27 Feb 43, by four officers who escaped, in 168th Inf Hist, Jan–Feb 43. (2) Memo, Col Drake for G–2 WD, 14 May 45, sub: Account of 168th Inf Opns 22 Dec 42–17 Feb 43. DRB AGO.

strength in the Gafsa area.[6] The actual attack on Gafsa was scheduled to begin only after Ziegler had released the *21st Panzer Division* (reinforced) to participate in it by converging on the objective from the northeast as *Kampfgruppe DAK* was approaching through El Guettar. When Axis troops discovered the Allied evacuation of Gafsa on 15 February, they occupied the town that same evening. Rommel sent reconnoitering elements southwest toward Metlaouï–Tozeur, and northwest toward Fériana, while *Division Centauro* established positions in the heights around Gafsa. The *21st Panzer Division* which was to have reinforced *Kampfgruppe DAK* for the battle at Gafsa was held in the vicinity of Sidi Bou Zid until its next commitment had been determined.[7]

With Sidi Bou Zid and Gafsa in enemy hands, what would be his next aggressive move? If command of the Axis forces had been unified, exploitation of the first successes might have been much more energetic and effective. As matters actually were, most of 16 February passed in efforts to clear the Americans from Djebel Ksaïra and Djebel Garet Hadid, and to ascertain Allied intentions. During a flying visit to Hitler's headquarters, Kesselring had to order the attack on Sbeïtla to proceed.

General Ziegler, shortly after midnight 15–16 February, directed the *10th Panzer Division* to reconnoiter toward Sbeïtla early in the morning and be prepared to attack the town during the day. At about the same time Ziegler conferred by telephone with von Arnim and pointed out that he would not be able to attack toward Hadjeb el Aïoun in the general direction of the Fondouk el Aouareb gap unless he could retain command over the *21st Panzer Division*. At 0745 von Arnim informed the *Kampfgruppe DAK* that he would not send the *21st Panzer Division* to the Gafsa area now in Axis possession. Immediately thereafter he called Ziegler and ordered him to strike against Sbeïtla with a brief, but powerful blow, destroy Allied supply dumps, and then turn north against Fondouk el Aouareb with the mission of destroying the Allied forces south of the gap. This second phase would be executed on 17 February. Elements of the *10th Panzer* and *21st Panzer Divisions* were meanwhile still engaged in the final effort to eliminate the stubbornly defended Allied strongholds on Djebels Lessouda, Garet Hadid, and Ksaïra. The main bodies of both divisions were assembled in the vicinity of Sidi Bou Zid.[8]

The Allied screening force in the vicinity of Djebel Hamra and Kern's Crossroads impeded the morning's reconnaissance. The American troops on the hills south of Sidi Bou Zid refused to yield although under

[6] The German forces were: *Headquarters, German Africa Corps; Panzer Grenadier Regiment Afrika; 1st Luftwaffe Jaeger Brigade* (two weak battalions); one armored battalion (twenty-six tanks) of the *15th Panzer Division; 33d Reconnaissance Battalion; Headquarters* and *1st Battalion, 1st Artillery Regiment Afrika; 1st Battalion, 190th Artillery Regiment; 3d Battery, 71st Rocket Projector Regiment; 1st Company, 200th Engineer Battalion; 1st Panzer Jaeger Company* (75-mm. antitank guns); *Headquarters, 135th Flak Regiment* (with five heavy and two light antiaircraft batteries); and medical service. The Italian reinforcements were from *Division Centauro:* two infantry battalions, two artillery battalions, one motorized battalion (*Bersaglieri*), one tank battalion (23 tanks) and one assault gun battery. Rpt, *German-Italian Panzer Army* to *Comando Supremo,* 16 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1081/4.*

[7] (1) *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Band 2,* 12–15 Feb 43. (2) MS # D–124 (von Liebenstein), 16 Jun 47. (3) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB IV,* 14–16 Feb 43.

[8] (1) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB IV,* 15, 16 Feb 43. (2) *Gefechtsbericht Faïd.*

persistent pressure and short of rations. When Ziegler conferred with his commanders at noon in Faïd over plans to attack Sbeïtla, he could not count on keeping the *21st Panzer Division* from Rommel indefinitely. Neither could he count on using all of *10th Panzer Division* because of von Arnim's projected employment of at least an armored task force to cut off the Allied units defending the mountainous positions south of Pichon. But what concern Ziegler may have had was lessened after Gerhardt's afternoon attack on Kern's Crossroads, and after he received intelligence that the Allied forces had been instructed to avoid battle at Sbeïtla.[9]

The Allied plan to evacuate Sbeïtla altered the enemy's situation drastically and its discovery brought about a swift change in General Ziegler's arrangements for the attack. Since he had not been obliged to send the *21st Panzer Division* to join in seizing Gafsa or for other commitment in that area he could therefore use it against Sbeïtla, thus freeing the *10th Panzer Division* for the next phase of its operations. In support of this operation *Fifth Panzer Army* ordered *Group Buhse* (*47 Grenadier Regiment*) to pin down the Allies by a frontal attack. With this operation von Arnim returned to an earlier concept, planned for the end of January, that had been frustrated when the Americans had struck against Maknassy.

For the immediate drive on Sbeïtla, General Ziegler initially was forced to employ *Group Gerhardt* (*10th Panzer Division*). But after the first contact with the Americans had been made at the outer defenses of Sbeïtla, the *21st Panzer Division* passed through the advanced force and Colonel Hildebrandt assumed responsibility for the operations there. Gerhardt and other elements of General von Broich's *10th Panzer Division* assembled during the night of 16–17 February near Kern's Crossroads for the thrust toward Fondouk. Using the less mobile elements of both panzer divisions, Colonel Rudolph Lang organized the defense of the Sidi Bou Zid–Faïd pass area.

While Ziegler's advance detachments were probing the defenses at Sbeïtla, finding them too strong to risk an attack that night, Colonel Pomptow, his chief of staff, briefed Rommel's headquarters on the situation. As a direct result, Rommel ordered Colonel von Liebenstein to advance from Gafsa without delay and capture Fériana by surprise, but avoid being tied down in a costly battle.

In striking for Fériana and Sbeïtla Rommel and von Arnim were going beyond the mission assigned to them by *Comando Supremo* and anticipating instructions for the second phase of the offensive. At 2250, 16 February, *Comando Supremo* directed von Arnim to exploit the successes in his sector with the strongest possible forces that supplies and available mobile reserves would permit. Rommel's mission—securing the Gafsa area—was left unchanged.[10]

The Axis Forces Squander a Day

As Sbeïtla, Fériana, and Thélepte were being seized on 17 February, the Axis forces were at the threshold of a much deeper penetration into the Allied southern flank

[9] (1) Memo for the record, 16 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1084.* (2) *Gefechtsbericht Faïd,* 16 Feb 43.

[10] (1) Msg, *Comando Supremo* to *Fifth Panzer Army,* 16 Feb 43, and Ltr containing the same directive, both in *Fifth Panzer Army, Ia, KTB, Anlagen, Geh. und Geh. Kdo. Sachen* (*Africa*), *Band 2.* (2) *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Band 2,* 17 Feb 43, and *KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1094.*

than that for which any firm plans existed. Rommel was inclined to encourage a thrust against Tébessa, perhaps advancing the entire Axis forward line to the westward. He asked von Arnim if he intended to exploit his successes in such a way.[11] The latter replied that he intended to use the *21st Panzer Division* around Sbeïtla and the *10th Panzer Division,* as originally planned, in the Fondouk–Pichon area. He would advance his main line of resistance only to the crests of the Eastern Dorsal in view of the state of his forces and supplies.[12]

The thrust which Rommel had in mind would have required combining the *10th* and *21st Panzer Divisions* with the *Kampfgruppe DAK.* In the absence of authoritative co-ordination from above, the two commanders made no preparations on 18 February to press beyond the Western Dorsal but merely reconnoitered from Sbeïtla and Thélepte. Rommel even started his only substantial reserves on the route back to the Mareth Position, while von Arnim committed the *10th Panzer Division* with *Group Buhse* near Fondouk as described above. One reconnaissance detachment of the *Kampfgruppe DAK* drove Allied defenders back into the passes near El Ma el Abiod, and another entered the undefended village of Kasserine. There it captured about sixty French soldiers as they arrived from farther east, and welcomed a reconnaissance unit from the *21st Panzer Division* which had come to Kasserine from Sbeïtla. In dismal rainy weather which greatly curtailed air activity, Axis air reconnaissance west of Kasserine showed that the Allies were not yet assembling at any point for a strong counterattack.[13]

The opportunity for exploitation beyond the Western Dorsal was still available, but the Allies had gained time for partial recovery while the Axis forces had become more dispersed. The momentum of the attack had slackened. Could it now be renewed? If so, what would be the objective? Would it be to weaken more severely the Allied ability to interfere with the Axis line of communications to their forces in the south, or would it be to threaten the Allied line of communications to the British First Army in the north? At what point could an Axis attack now bring about the westward withdrawal of the Allied forces in northern Tunisia?

The Allied Line Swings Back

The night of 16–17 February, on which the U.S. 1st Armored Division defended Sbeïtla, was the second night of extensive and complicated Allied troop movements carrying out the Allied decision of 15 February to swing the front from the Eastern to the Western Dorsal. The innumerable transfers of smaller units fell into a general pattern. This pattern consisted of southward shifts by British armored forces in order to cover westward withdrawals through these elements by American and French units, after which the British forces also moved west and southwest to join in defending critical points along the new line. The easterly bulge in the Allied front north of Sbeïtla–Sidi Bou Zid on 15 February

[11] (1) *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Band 2,* 17 Feb 43. (2) Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass,* pp. 352–53. (3) *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9 Anlage 1095.*

[12] Msg, *Fifth Panzer Army,* von Arnim to *Comando Supremo,* 1935, 17 Feb 43, *Fifth Panzer Army, Ia, KTB, Anlagen, Geh. und Geh. Kdo. Sachen (Afrika), Band 2,* p. 281.

[13] *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Band 2,* 18 Feb 43 and Rpt, *DAK* to *Panzer Army Africa,* 18 Feb 43, in *KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1102/2.*

was flattened out first at the south, where it was largest. North of this point the bulge rolled like a shrinking wave as far as the Ousseltia valley, where French and American troops simply moved back a short distance to the heights fringing the valley on the west. Just before the decision to pull back, General Ryder's 34th Infantry Division (less the 168th Combat Team and the 2d Battalion, 133d Infantry) had assumed responsibility for the Pichon–Djebel Trozza (997) section of the Allied front under General Koeltz. On 16–17 February it began shifting to Sbiba gap.

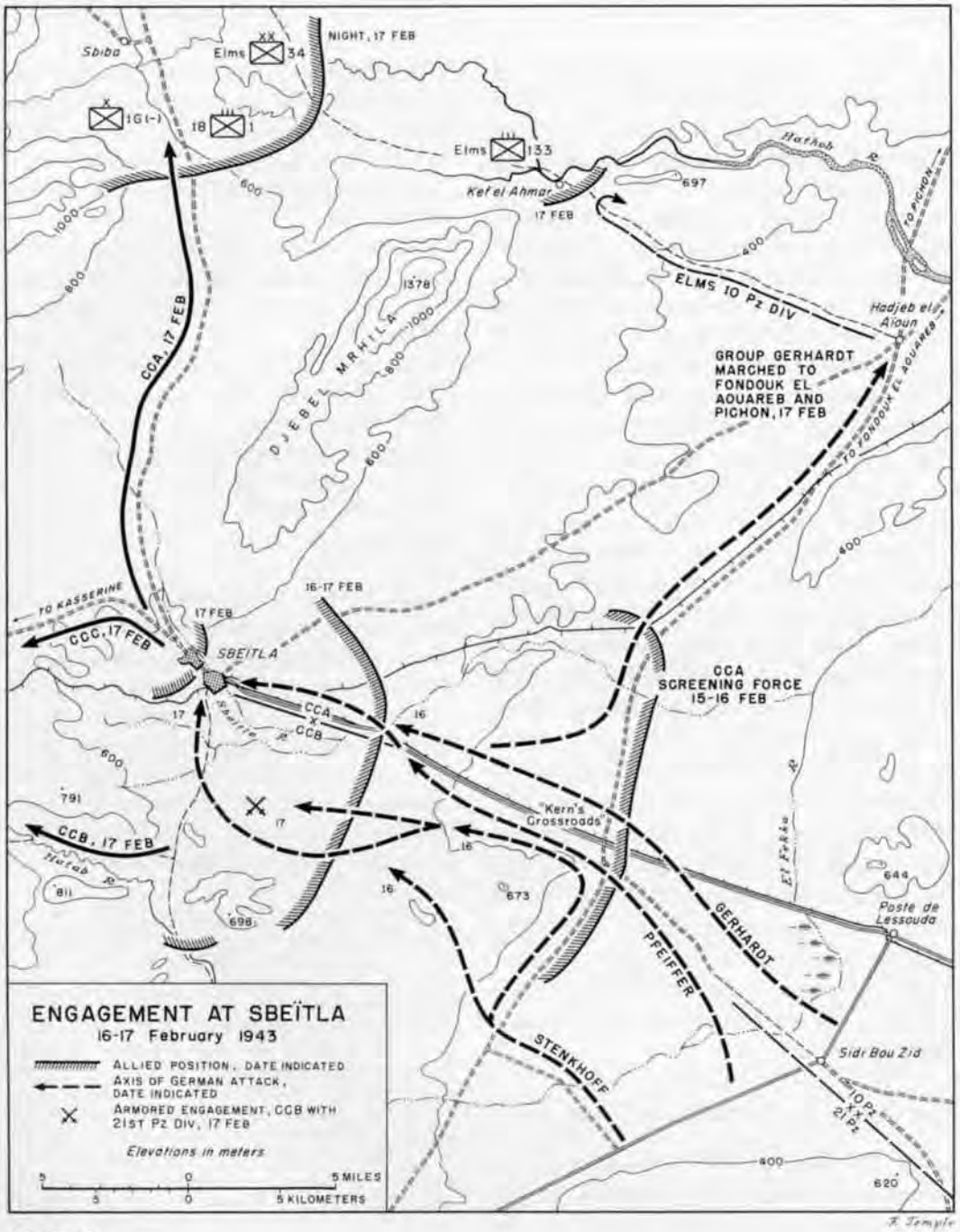
The shortened Allied line resulting from the changes in the Ousseltia–Pichon area permitted the subsequent withdrawal of the 16th Regimental Combat Team of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division from the Ousseltia heights southwestward to the II Corps area between Tébessa and Fériana. The exigencies of the situation during the week of 17–23 February brought elements of the British 6th Armoured Division and British 1st Guards Brigade into Sbiba and Thala, and hastened the arrival at Thala of the artillery of the U.S. 9th Infantry Division after a dramatically timed march from beyond Oran.[14]

First Army finally released Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, to II Corps on 15 February for employment at Sbeïtla. During the following night the unit moved by two routes to Sbeïtla, where it passed to division control. Late on 16 February it moved into position southeast of the village.

Sbeïtla, site of an ancient Roman town, lies about one mile south of a tip of Djebel Mrhila (1378), a long and lofty ridge extending eighteen or more miles north-northeastward. About five miles south of Sbeïtla is a lower chain of hills, with widely spaced crests, running roughly westward from Djebel Hamra (673). To the northeast of these hills, Combat Command A, reinforced on 15–16 February, maintained its covering outer line. (*Map 12*) Thus Sbeïtla lies in a wide gap between hills, approached from the east over a rising plain. It has at its back another wide expanse of open plateau reaching to the base of the Western Dorsal, from Kasserine village north to Sbiba. Two streams, one the Sbeïtla river, the other a tributary from the southwest, converge some five miles east of the village and drain northeasterly, eventually joining the Zeroud river, which flows through the Eastern Dorsal near Hadjeb el Aïoun. The Sbeïtla river runs in a deep-sunk channel along the northeastern side of the town. Olive groves and cultivated fields are plentiful along these streams. A narrow-gauge railway which connects Sousse on the coast with the mining town of Metlaouï in the southwest runs through Sbeïtla to Kasserine and beyond. A railroad bridge and another of three arches, formerly an aqueduct, cross the Sbeïtla river about half a mile east of the modern village. For almost two miles east of the highway bridge, the road from Faïd runs through olive groves. The Allies expected the attack to come along this road, first to a bridge five miles east-southeast of Sbeïtla, and thence perhaps fanning out on either side of the road to find any weak point in the main defense line nearer the village.

First Army needed time to organize the defense of Sbiba gap with troops which were to move in on the night of 16–17 February and on the following night. The 1st Armored Division had to cover from the

[14] (1) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (2) II Corps AAR, 2 May 43.


NIGHT, 17 FEB
Sbiba
Elms XX 34
X 1G(-)
18 1
Elms III 133
Kef el Ahmar
17 FEB
Hatheb R.
TO PICHON
697
400
ELMS 10 Pz DIV
Hadjeb el Aioun
1378
DJEBEL MRHILA
1000
800
600
CCA, 17 FEB
GROUP GERHARDT MARCHED TO FONDOUK EL AOUAREB AND PICHON, 17 FEB
TO FONDOUK EL AOUAREB
TO KASSERINE
CCC, 17 FEB
16-17 FEB
17 FEB
SBEITLA
CCA SCREENING FORCE 15-16 FEB
CCA
CCB
Sbeitla R.
17
16
791
CCB, 17 FEB
Kern's Crossroads
El Ferkia R.
644
Poste de Lessouda
811
673
698
GERHARDT
PFEIFFER
STENKHOFF
Sidi Bou Zid
10 Pz
21 Pz
620
ENGAGEMENT AT SBEÏTLA
16-17 February 1943
ALLIED POSITION, DATE INDICATED
AXIS OF GERMAN ATTACK, DATE INDICATED
ARMORED ENGAGEMENT, CCB WITH 21ST Pz DIV, 17 FEB
Elevations in meters
5 0 5 MILES
5 0 5 KILOMETERS
R. Temple

MAP 12

south the organization at Sbiba until all these troops had come in. As long as First Army set no specific time for evacuating Sbeïtla, II Corps was obliged to leave the 1st Armored Division in the dark, or at least in the fog of war, about it. Meanwhile the division had the problem of adapting its defensive tactics to the requirements of a situation in which it was not only expected to gain an indefinite amount of time but also to preserve itself "as a fighting force." [15] The defending troops must neither be pinned down nor enveloped and cut off. The delaying action had to be conducted in an area where Djebel Mrhila on the north and the lower ridge on the south protected the flanks, but which had very little depth, since the loss of Sbeïtla would immediately open the northward route to Sbiba. From Djebel Hamra westward for about eight miles, there was little cover and there were no strong positions. Three miles east of Sbeïtla, at the edge of extensive olive groves, General Ward elected to establish his main line of resistance, with Combat Command B holding the southern sector and Combat A, upon withdrawal from the Djebel Hamra line late on 16 February, the northern sector. The Faïd–Sbeïtla road was the boundary between them. Throughout the day Combat Command C was attached to General McQuillin's force.

The Attack on Sbeïtla Begins, 16 February

During 15 and 16 February, with the enemy's intentions still uncertain, Sbeïtla remained screened by the forward line near Kern's Crossroads and Djebel Hamra.[16] On 16 February all counterattacks were prohibited by General Anderson's orders; General Fredendall's forces were henceforth to concentrate on defending Sbeïtla, Kasserine, and Fériana.[17]

Enemy tanks of *Group Gerhardt* crept over the plains southwest of Djebel Lessouda (644) toward the forward defenses of Sbeïtla during 16 February, and in mid-afternoon, it seemed apparent that others farther southwest were assembling for an attack. Colonel Crosby's 3d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment (less Company G), was sent forward at 1600 from a position in reserve south of Sbeïtla to reinforce the screen and prolong the defense until Combat Command A could move into the positions which General McQuillin and Colonel Hains had reconnoitered earlier that afternoon and had assigned to the various units.[18] The infantry and artillery, under orders to withdraw to these new positions, started back in the latter part of the afternoon, leaving as a covering force Colonel Hightower's provisional unit and Company G (Capt. Herman McWatters), 13th Armored Regiment, and for lack of orders to move back,

[15] Phone Conv, Gen Ward with Col Akers, 16 Feb 43, Entry 109, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[16] Units under McQuillin's command were: his own Combat Command A with 1st Armored Regiment (—1st Battalion), 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, 3d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion (—), 91st Field Artillery Battalion, one battery, 68th Field Artillery Battalion, C Company, 16th Engineer Battalion, five guns, 106th Coast Artillery, one battery, 213th Coast Artillery (90-mm. guns); and Combat Command C consisting of 3d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment (—), 68th Field Artillery Battalion (—), 16th Engineer Battalion (—), elements 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, one company, 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion. 1st Armd Div G–3 Jnl.

[17] Msg, Adv First Army to II Corps, 1045, 16 Feb 43, Entry 97, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[18] Copy in CCA 1st Armd Div AAR, 23 Jan–26 Feb 43, pp. 33–34.

elements of the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion on the southern flank. The enemy's forward elements attempted to turn the northern flank of McWatters' company about 1700, but the reinforcements led by Colonel Crosby arrived at an opportune time to catch the Germans by surprise and quickly drive them back. Hightower's tanks successfully stopped another German column and then withdrew. Darkness was falling, but the troops saw a strong enemy armored force in three columns approaching along the axis of the Faïd–Sbeïtla road behind Company G as that unit followed the remainder of the 3d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, toward Sbeïtla. A rear guard action with sporadic firing ensued, while the bulk of Combat Command A, after replenishing fuel and ammunition supplies from dumps in the olive grove about two miles east of Sbeïtla, moved into new defensive positions. The tank destroyers, after being cut off on the south flank at Djebel Hamra, dispersed and filtered back farther south during the night.[19]

The attacking force, *Group Gerhardt,* was heading for the bridge on the Faïd–Sbeïtla road about five miles east-southeast of Sbeïtla. A second group (Pfeiffer's), consisting of one tank battalion, one armored infantry battalion, two field batteries, and some antitank units of the *21st Panzer Division,* was expected to pass through the advanced force near the bridge and make the attack.[20] The Germans expected the Allies to abandon Sbeïtla, and hoped to hasten the process by following closely on the heels of Colonel Crosby's command.

It was a frosty night with a pale moon showing between patches of moving overcast. When Pfeiffer's forward detachment came near enough to the American rear guard to see the dim outlines of its vehicles, the Germans opened fire. Some fire carried into the olive groves beside the highway and fell either near the command post of Combat Command A, or among troops refueling vehicles, or on supply dumps under the trees. An improvised mine-laying unit which had been sent out that night to strengthen the defense line was dispersed, with its work barely begun. On the southwestern side of a wide, deep, straight-sided wadi about one mile east of Sbeïtla, General McQuillin's command had emplaced some 90-mm. dual-purpose guns. The 68th Armored Field Artillery Battalion had its 105-mm. howitzers under olive trees along the Faïd–Sbeïtla road, and the 91st Field Artillery Battalion was expected to take adjacent positions when it arrived in the area. The 3d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, had the mission of protecting this artillery and of supporting Combat Command A's armor, which was assigned to defensive positions at various points along the line—north of the Faïd road, astride the railroad, and in front of the artillery—and which was ordered to keep in readiness to counterattack. The main line of resistance was to be held until a time to be set by corps order.[21]

Combat Command B under General Robinett, south of the Sbeïtla–Faïd road, had already moved into its area during the afternoon in time to reconnoiter and or-

[19] (1) 3d Bn 1st Armd Regt AAR, 1 Jan–21 Feb 43, 30 Jul 43. (2) 3d Bn 13th Armd Regt Hist, 18 Oct 42–13 Nov 43, compiled by Maj Harold F. Blodgett. (3) Phone Conv, Col Howze with Lt Col John T. Honeycutt, 1327, 16 Feb 43, Entry 106, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (4) 1st Armd Div G–3 Jnl lists a total of seventy-six killed, wounded, and missing on 16 February 1943.

[20] *Gefechtsbericht Faïd,* 16 Feb 43.

[21] (1) CCC 1st Armd Div S–3 Jnl, 16 Feb 43. (2) 6th Armd Inf AAR, 2 Sep 43; CCA 1st Armd Div AAR, 23 Jan–26 Feb 43, pp. 33–34.

ganize for an active defense by maneuver and counterattack. Co-ordination between the combat commands remained to be arranged during the night. Most of Combat Command A was not yet well established in its new positions, which many of its units reached in the dark after their withdrawal from the Djebel Hamra line, and the situation was being straightened out, when the enemy's reconnaissance by fire neared the line. General McQuillin shifted his command post west of Sbeïtla, and for a time he was out of communication with division headquarters. Colonel Hains remained temporarily in the Combat Command A's advance command post at the old location two miles east of Sbeïtla, although small arms fire had begun falling in the vicinity. At this juncture the situation suddenly got out of hand.

For most of the troops it was a first experience under night attack. They were hit at a time when the effect of defeats and exhaustion during the past three days was intensified by a pervading sense of confusion, a belief that those in command were at best "playing by ear." The firing could be widely heard. Some vehicles moved from the olive groves, where scattered enemy fire was falling, onto the road and started westward. Soon others joined them. Before long the road was a dense mass of churning traffic which streamed through Sbeïtla in the darkness, choking the roads and threatening to leave Sbeïtla half-defended. Other important elements of Combat Command A stood fast, including many of the tanks of the 3d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, and the provisional company, 1st Armored Regiment.[22]

Many troops who heard the explosions and saw the fire attributed the demolition of a water pumping station, an ammunition dump, and the railroad bridge to enemy action. The enemy force, apparently unaware of the actual situation, recognized that Sbeïtla was being evacuated but reported that the Allies were still resisting strongly rather than making a full withdrawal. It received orders to wait for daylight. By then, the Allied situation at Sbeïtla had been clarified and improved.[23]

General Ward, for a time without enough accurate knowledge of the situation to exert control, received some first-hand oral reports about midnight and concluded that Combat Command A was under imminent attack by a very large armored force. After taking appropriate steps to meet the immediate problems, he reported to General Fredendall that the situation was extremely grave, since the Germans were at the edge of Sbeïtla with about nine Mark VI and eighty Mark IV tanks, a spearhead of that force having already pierced the covering line three miles to the east. This dire estimate was transmitted to Brig. C. V. McNabb at Advance Headquarters, First Army, to General Anderson, and to General Truscott at the Advance Headquarters, AFHQ. Truscott had sent Colonel Carleton to Sbeïtla during the day, and received a confirmatory report from him shortly after hearing from Fredendall.

By 0130, 17 February, Anderson via McNabb authorized Fredendall to withdraw Ward's command from Sbeïtla and from Fériana a force under Colonel Stark that

[22] (1) 3d Bn 13th Armd Regt Hist, 18 Oct 42–13 Nov 43. (2) Interv with Col Ben S. Crosby, 19 Mar 51.

[23] (1) *21st Panzer Div, KTB,* 17 Feb 43. (2) CCC 1st Armd Div Jnl, 16–17 Feb 43. (3) CCB 1st Armd Div AAR, 1 Mar 43.

had previously withdrawn from Gafsa.[24] Now satisfied that this attack was the main enemy offensive, he had taken steps to expedite the reinforcement of Sbiba through emergency daylight moves by the British 1st Guards Brigade (less one battalion), with Combat Team 18, U.S. 1st Infantry Division, attached, supplemented first by General Ryder's U.S. 34th Infantry Division (less 168th Infantry and 2d Battalion, 133d Infantry), and next, by the British 26th Armoured Brigade (less 16/5 Lancers) under command of Brig. Charles Dunphie. Somewhat later in the day, General Keightley's Headquarters, 6th Armoured Division, was transferred to XIX Corps with the mission of defending Sbiba gap. The corps boundary was redefined to extend from a point four miles south of Sbiba to Hadjeb el Aïoun.[25]

General Fredendall instructed Colonel Stark to place a small covering detachment of infantry, light tanks, and heavy artillery (155's) in defense of Fériana until 1800, 17 February, while the remainder of his command, with elements of the Constantine Division, took position on the heights north of Thélepte. He alerted Col. Paul L. Williams, of the XII Air Support Command at Thélepte, that his planes must be flown off at daybreak. He ordered Col. Anderson T. W. Moore's force (19th Engineers and 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry) defending a line east of Kasserine village to hold it until General Ward's force had passed through, and then to organize Kasserine pass for defense. During the night of 17–18 February this order was executed.[26]

Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, received a division order at about 0300, 17 February, which indicated that Sbeïtla must be held at all costs until 1100. It was superseded by another about an hour later which directed it to hold on a line south and east of the town until ordered to withdraw. This change reflected a disagreement between Fredendall and Anderson, who had wanted Sbeïtla held all day. General Robinett reorganized his command for static defense. He placed his tanks (2d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment) in defiladed positions about four miles southeast of Sbeïtla and brought the guns of the 27th Armored Field Artillery back of the tanks. He designated the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion to man the outpost line a few miles east of the main line of resistance. Using every opportunity to hide, hit, and maneuver, it was to help hold off the expected enemy onslaught. Two companies of the 2d Battalion (Lt. Col. Elton W. Ringsak), 6th Armored Infantry, were placed on the high ground of Djebel El Koumin (698) and Djebel Sabel Dilou (811) in position to command a road which ran between them northward to Sbeïtla.[27]

[24] See pp. 417–18 above. It comprised the 3d Battalion, 26th Infantry, the 1st Ranger Battalion, the 175th Field Artillery Battalion, E & C Squadrons, British Derbyshire Yeomanry, French units of the Constantine Division, and, beginning 8 February, the 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry, held in Fériana after that date as II Corps reserve.

(1) DMC Jnl. (2) 168th Inf Hist. (3) 175th FA War Diary. (4) 1st Armd Div G–3 Jnl.

[25] (1) CCC 1st Armd Div Jnl, 16–17 Feb 43. (2) Ltr, Col Hightower to Col Howze, 1 Jul 46. In private possession. (3) Intervs with Col Hains, 26 Apr 51, and Col Crosby, 19 Mar 51. (4) Msg R–255, Truscott to Rooks for Eisenhower, 17 Feb 43. Copy in AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 111. (5) Msg O–436, Adv First Army to II Corps, 5 Corps, and XIX Corps. Same file, 112. (6) DMC Jnl, 17 Feb 43.

[26] (1) II Corps G–3 Jnl and Msg file. (2) Msg 261, Truscott to Rooks, 17 Feb 43. Copy in AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 116.

[27] (1) CCB 1st Armd Div AAR, 1 Mar 43. (2) 601st TD Bn, Detailed Opns Rpt to CG 1st Armd Div, 17 Feb 43. OPD 381 Africa, Sec 4, Case 120.

The enemy did not attack Sbeïtla at dawn, as the Allies had expected. At 0715, the advanced element of the attacking force stayed in contact, watching Allied truck trains leave Sbeïtla, while the main force waited for additional units from Sidi Bou Zid in order to make a full-scale assault at noon. Both sides kept up harassing artillery fire. Probing attacks during the morning indicated that the terrain of the northeastern approaches was not suited for a large-scale tank attack. Colonel Hildebrandt therefore decided to launch his main effort with *Group Stenkhoff* south of the Sbeïtla–Sidi Bou Zid road. At the same time Pfeiffer's infantry would attack directly from the east. Shortly after noon the assault was launched against Combat Command B at Sbeïtla.[28]

The armored attack (Stenkhoff's) came over the rough plain, the wadies, and other impediments, on a broad front. It was supported by enemy aviation, but exposed to Allied artillery. The defenders were organized in depth and had taken advantage of all the cover and defilade available. The enemy found the tanks in sand dunes, hull down, and interspersed with antitank guns. The German tanks first hit Combat Command B's north flank, screened by the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion (Lt. Col. Herschel D. Baker), in overwhelming strength. Three groups of enemy tanks converged on the American half-tracks in quick succession. Some of the tank destroyers fired smoke shells and gained a chance to shift position and continue firing for about half an hour. By that time, others, and soon all the vehicles, were streaking back to a designated rally point only to find it under enemy fire. One platoon was extricated from envelopment by the courageous guidance of the battalion executive, Capt. Edward Austin. The bulk of the battalion passed out of control and hurried toward Sbeïtla. Some were stopped by staff officers of Combat Command B near its command post. Those who may have planned to reorganize near Sbeïtla and swing back into battle found that place under fire and in a turmoil of traffic and air bombardment. They then allowed themselves to be swept along in the stream of vehicles toward Kasserine. A few emerged west of the town and circled back to the southeast but were of no benefit to the forces engaged there. The remainder continued to Kasserine and joined in the defense arrangements at that point.

During the latter part of the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion's delaying action, and while it was falling back, another encounter, the critical episode in the defense of Sbeïtla by Combat Command B, was being stubbornly fought farther south. The tanks of the 2d Battalion (Lt. Col. Henry E. Gardiner), 13th Armored Regiment, had been placed hull down in a wadi from which they could oppose heavier German armor trying to break through. A frontal attack against their position about 1315 by Stenkhoff's much superior tank group gave them the opportunity for which they had hoped. Waiting until the range was very close, they fired a volley which instantly knocked out five or more tanks and completely disrupted the enemy formation. Stenkhoff's force, recognizing that it had entered a trap, pulled back under fire from the 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion.

An hour after the frontal attack on Gardiner's tanks, the enemy had reorganized and was threatening Robinett's south flank. At this point his troops received orders to begin a gradual withdrawal, taking care not

[28] (1) *Gefechtsbericht Faïd,* 16–17 Feb 43. (2) *21st Panzer Div, KTB,* 16–17 Feb 43.

to uncover the most forward artillery battery, and to use routes south of Sbeïtla to reach new positions south and east of Kasserine village. The shift to the west began about 1430. One platoon of medium tanks under Lt. John C. Gleason was sent to cover the north flank in Sbeïtla, which had been uncovered when Combat Command A had begun to withdraw at 1130. The 2d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, pulled out of its hill positions and followed a trail between Djebel Sabel Dilou and Djebel Rhéradok (791) into Kasserine. Company A, 16th Engineers, marched independently to Kasserine pass with one of Colonel Ringsak's companies. Last to leave were Gardiner's tank battalion, along with Battery C, 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, and the Reconnaissance Company, 13th Armored Regiment. Between 1730 and darkness, which came about 1900, they disengaged with a loss of nine tanks, among them Colonel Gardiner's. Their route brought them to the Sbeïtla–Kasserine road about five miles east of Kasserine. They swung into a divisional gasoline dump north of the highway and in blackout gassed up their vehicles and piled on all possible five-gallon containers before continuing through Kasserine pass to a bivouac on the road between it and Thala.[29]

Combat Command A, now much reduced, meanwhile continued its withdrawal under a dive-bomber attack after noon along the road leading northward through Sbiba. After stopping here during the night to cover the withdrawal of Allied units into the Sbiba position, it swung westward in a wide loop to Tébessa. Combat Command C, after short movements by some of its elements during the morning to get out of enemy artillery range and after covering McQuillin's withdrawal, made its first westward bound toward Kasserine at 1430. In successive jumps of 1,000–1,200 yards, the 3d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, and elements of the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, then the 68th Field Artillery Battalion, and finally the 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment (less two companies), broke contact with the enemy in Sbeïtla and withdrew on division orders to new positions northwest of Sbeïtla covering the road to Kasserine village. At midnight these troops, with whom were intermingled rear elements of Combat Command B, began the march down the last stretch to Kasserine. The enemy, moving into Sbeïtla after 1700, organized his defense without interrupting the Allied withdrawal.[30]

With the loss of Sbeïtla, the II Corps had experienced the consequences of an overextended defense and a successful concentration of enemy force. It could gain some satisfaction in the fact that the enemy found no booty in the almost deserted town. Most supplies had been removed or destroyed. The Allies had blown up bridges, water mains, and the aqueduct supplying Sfax. They had placed obstacles and mines on some of the approaches. Shells had fallen on the city all day, and from time to time,

[29] (1) CCB 1st Armd Div AAR, 1 Mar 43. (2) Brig Gen Paul M. Robinett (Ret.), Among the First, MS. In private possession. (3) The Germans reported counting twenty-seven disabled or destroyed American tanks and tank destroyers on the battlefield southeast of Sbeïtla. They could salvage all their own losses and had sixty-five tanks ready for action. *21st Panzer Div, KTB*, 18 Feb 43. (4) Col. Henry E. Gardiner, "We Fought at Kasserine," *Armored Cavalry Journal*, LVII, No. 2 (March–April, 1948), 8ff.

[30] (1) CCC 1st Armed Div Jnl, 17 Feb 43. (2) 6th Armd Inf AAR, 23 Jan–26 Feb 43. (3) Interv with Lt Col Jacob Shapiro (Ret.) (then CO, Co A, 13th Armd Regt), 7 Dec 51. (4) *21st Panzer Division, KTB*, 17 Feb 43.

enemy aircraft had bombed it. The great Roman arch and temples, which earlier had loomed up now and then, as intermittent showers of cold rain cleared the air of a pall of smoke and dust, were now concealed by darkness despite the smoldering fires. The 1st Armored Division's withdrawal, although protected by only a few Allied Spitfires, was carried through on the whole in an orderly and effective manner. All trains, even those in the Sidi Bou Zid area, had been ordered out in time. Enemy aircraft had inflicted considerable damage along the roads but the enemy had captured very little equipment which he could use.[31]

The *21st Panzer Division* claimed that it had wrecked the American 1st Armored Division and the U.S. 168th Infantry Regiment. Others were to share this view, but the fact was that Combat Command B had emerged from one defensive battle in shape to fight another, and by 1800 on 18 February had been brought through Kasserine pass and Tébessa to the forested mountains near El Ma el Abiod. Combat Commands A and C were again consolidated in positions a little farther south along the mountain chain. The division, after trooping back in low spirits near columns of French infantry and cavalry, took up positions on the plain southeast of Tébessa, and during the night of 18–19 February received the mission of protecting Tébessa from the east and south in co-ordination with other Allied units which had withdrawn from Gafsa and Fériana.[32]

Withdrawal to Sbiba—Loss of Fériana and Thélepte

While the *21st Panzer Division* was capturing Sbeïtla on 17 February, *Group Gerhardt* of the *10th Panzer Division* began its northward march toward Pichon in conformity with General von Arnim's plan for what should follow Operation *FRUEHLINGSWIND*. His intention was to have this force and *Group Buhse,* attacking from the east, seize Pichon and cut off the Allied forces in the Eastern Dorsal. *Group Gerhardt,* advancing via Hadjeb el Aïoun, and *Group Buhse* established contact at 1600 on 17 February. But their advance was slowed down by mines, and except for a rear guard at Pichon the Allies extricated themselves from both positions well in advance of the move to cut them off. General von Arnim's mistaken estimate of Allied strength and intentions and the delayed movement of the *10th Panzer Division* had turned the drive to the north into a blow at thin air.[33]

The Allies completed their withdrawal to the Western Dorsal during the night of 17–18 February. (*See Map 10.*) At Sbiba, after Combat Command A passed through the defile on the 17th, British engineers closed the gap in the mine field. The Sbiba position, thus protected, was held at first by two units under command of Headquarters,

[31] The *21st Panzer Division* concluded the day's action on 17 February with 65 tanks ready for action and with a record for the past four days which it tabulated as follows: 2,546 Allied prisoners; 103 tanks and 5 aircraft destroyed; 280 vehicles, 18 field guns, 3 antitank guns, 1 antiaircraft battery, and equipment from 1 service and 1 medical company captured or destroyed. (1) Msg, *21st Panzer Div* to *Panzer Army Africa,* 2359, 17 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1090/5.* (2) *Anlage zum Divisionsbefehl Nr. 4, 21st Pzr Div,* 18 Feb 43, *21st Panzer Div, KTB, Anlagenband 9.*

[32] Memo, CG 1st Armd Div for CG CCB, 19 Feb 43. 1st Armd Div Hist Rcds, Vol. II.

[33] (1) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB IV,* 17 Feb 43. (2) *Gefechtsbericht Faïd.* (3) *10th Panzer Div, Ic, Taetigkeitsbericht,* 17 Feb 43. (4) XIX Corps Journal de Marche, 16–18 Feb 43.

British 6th Armored Division—the 1st Guards Brigade, and the 18th Infantry, U.S. 1st Infantry Division. On a line to the northeast of Sbiba, three battalions of the U.S. 34th Infantry Division, one from the 133d Infantry (Colonel Fountain) and two from the 135th Infantry (Colonel Ward), and attached French troops, were moved into position. The 135th Infantry was in contact with elements of the 1st U.S. Infantry Division farther north. Not until late on 18 February did the enemy begin to probe these new lines of defense.[34]

Meanwhile, *Kampfgruppe DAK* on 17 February captured Fériana, as Allied rearguards after a short fight pulled out about noon. Continuing the pursuit *DAK* pushed on to Thélepte. Allied demolitions left the Thélepte airbase with little of military value. Thirty-four planes which could not be flown away were demolished. The Germans captured some French ammunition stocks and fuzes. At the fuel depot, they salvaged 20 tons of aviation gasoline and 30 tons of lubricants.[35] In these engagements Liebenstein was wounded by a mine and turned his command over to General Karl Buelowius, formerly artillery commander of the *Afrika Korps*.[36]

[34] Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[35] (1) Rpt of Capt John B. Upton, in 19th Engrs (C) Hist Rcds, Oct 42–Jan 44. (2) Rad, *DAK Qu* to *O Qu German–Italian Panzer Army*, 19 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 10, Anlage 187.*

[36] (1) *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Band 2,* 15–17 Feb 43. (2) *Deutsches Afrika Korps, Abt Ia, Kriegstagebuch vom 1.I.–28.II.43* (cited hereafter as *DAK, KTB*), 17 Feb 43. (3) MS #D–124 (von Liebenstein).

CHAPTER XXIII

Rommel's Thrust Through Kasserine Pass

The first phase of exploitation after the battles near Sidi Bou Zid had come to an end when not only Gafsa but also Sbeïtla and Fériana, and the airfield at Thélepte, were abandoned by the Allies. On 17 February the two main axis forces, *DAK* at Fériana and *21st Panzer Division* at Sbeïtla, had accomplished their separate missions. The *10th Panzer Division* had established contact with the Axis forces at Fondouk el Aouareb gap and, in conformity with von Arnim's orders, was on its way to an assembly area north of Kairouan. Reconnaissance in force was probing the gaps in the Western Dorsal from Sbiba to El Ma el Abiod on 18 February, and air reconnaissance revealed that Allied troops were moving westward from the Kasserine pass and Bou Chebka areas. It appeared that the Allies were concentrating their forces around Tébessa, and perhaps leaving only rearguards to defend the passes through the Grand Dorsal. Clearly, the initiative was still with the Axis forces.[1]

The Axis Decision of 18 February

These developments led Field Marshal Rommel, in an uprush of sanguine anticipations, to go beyond the views he had expressed on the previous evening (17 February), that his own forces were not strong enough to undertake an attack against Tébessa and that such an operation could succeed, but only if reinforced by the main body of von Arnim's mobile forces and supported by a holding attack along the *Fifth Panzer Army*'s northern and central sectors.[2] It now seemed to him that the opportunity had returned to accomplish the very kind of operation that he had once hopefully advanced as a reason for bringing his army swiftly back from Libya to Tunisia. At 1420 in the afternoon of the 18th, after an exchange of messages and a telephone conversation had revealed to Rommel the unyielding opposition of von Arnim to his proposals, the field marshal turned to *Comando Supremo* and Kesselring with this message:

> On the basis of the enemy situation as of today, I propose an immediate enveloping thrust from the southwest [sic] on Tébessa and the area to the north of it, provided *Fifth Panzer Army*'s supply situation is adequate. This offensive must be executed with strong forces. I therefore request that *10th Panzer* and *21st Panzer Divisions* be assigned to me and move immediately to the assembly area Thélepte–Fériana.[3]

[1] (1) *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Band 2*, 17, 18 Feb 43. (2) Rpt, *German-Italian Panzer Army* to *OB SOUTH*, 17 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1099/3*. (3) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB IV*, 17, 18 Feb 43. (4) *Gefechtsbericht Faïd*, 17, 18 Feb 43.

[2] *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Band 2*, 17 Feb 43.

[3] (1) Msg, *German-Italian Panzer Army*, Rommel to *Comando Supremo* and *OB SOUTH*, 1420, 18 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1107*. (2) *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Band 2*, 18 Feb 43.



FIELD MARSHAL ROMMEL *(third from left) and members of his staff, Tunisia.*

Rommel's concept was that a wide enveloping operation through Tébessa with the ultimate objective of Bône, outflanking the reserves that the Allies were feeding into their lengthening southern front and disrupting their lines of communication, would force the British First Army to pull out of Tunisia altogether.

Rommel's proposal met with full approval from the Commander in Chief, South, who had just returned to Frascati from a visit to Hitler at his headquarters in East Prussia. In his absence from Rome the vague *Comando Supremo* order of 16 February, ordering exploitation of the successes gained at Sidi Bou Zid, had made von Arnim instead of Rommel responsible for such operations—a critical departure from *OB SOUTH*'s original concept. One result had been the dissolution of *Group Ziegler* at a time when it might, despite the original plans, have been concentrated for pursuit.[1] Supporting Rommel's proposal, Kesselring radioed to the two army commanders in Tunisia:

I consider it essential to continue the attack toward Tébessa and northward by concen-

[1] (1) See pp. 426–27 above. (2) MS # C–075 (Kesselring). (3) MS # D–309 (Deichmann).

trating all available forces on the left wing and exploiting our recent successes with a blow that can still have vast consequences for the enemy. This is for your preliminary information. I shall speak in this sense to the Duce and [General] Ambrosio today.[5]

Rommel waited impatiently for the decision. Late on the evening of the 18th he sent another urgent message to *Comando Supremo* asking that the *21st Panzer Division* be rushed to Thélepte and the *10th Panzer Division,* to Kasserine to launch the proposed offensive by the next evening. Clearly, Rommel's objective was still Tébessa.[6]

Shortly before midnight the order requested by Rommel reached him at his advanced headquarters. *Comando Supremo,* stating that "a unique opportunity is now offered to force a decisive success in Tunisia," directed that a deep thrust be made toward the north to threaten the rear of British 5 Corps; if possible to isolate it; in any event to force its withdrawal. With all available mobile elements of his own *German-Italian Panzer Army,* as well as the *10th Panzer* and *21st Panzer Divisions,* now assigned to him, Rommel was directed to attack toward Maktar–Tadjerouïne with Le Kef as his initial objective. He was to concentrate his forces along a line from Sbeïtla to Tébessa. A modicum of forces could provide flank security along the line Tébessa–Tozeur. *Comando Supremo* was convinced the Mareth Position would be safe from powerful attacks for another week or longer. That sector, defended with a minimum of mobile reserves, was to remain under Rommel's command.

Fifth Panzer Army was directed to prepare itself to launch a holding attack on a wide front between the coast and Pont-du-Fahs. In the meantime it was to tie down and harass the Allies by frequent local attacks. In co-operation with the *Naval Command, Africa,* von Arnim was also to prepare to land troops at Tabarka. The *Second Air Force* was to organize a parachute mission to destroy the bridges at Le Kef. *Comando Supremo* assured the army commanders of stepped-up shipments of troops and supplies by air and sea.[7]

The directive from *Comando Supremo* disappointed Rommel. It set an objective deep in the rear of the position of the Allies in the north; to this extent it was in accord with his intention of forcing a general Allied withdrawal into Algeria. But by making Le Kef the objective *Comando Supremo*'s directive rejected the method which Rommel had proposed—a wide circling movement through Tébessa. Tébessa, to be sure, was named, but only as the western anchor of his drive in the direction of Le Kef instead of being the first objective of a wide enveloping sweep toward Bône. This shift Rommel regarded as appallingly shortsighted, since it would send the main Axis drive into the midst of Allied reserves, and it would jeopardize seizure and destruction of the vital Allied nerve center at Tébessa, the base from which, as Rommel was aware, II Corps had been preparing to launch an aggressive drive eastward into the Sfax–Gabès area.[8]

[5] Rad, Kesselring to Rommel and von Arnim, 1630, 18 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1108,* and *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB, Anlagen, g. Kdos. (Chefsachen), 16.1–26.11.43, Tunisien, Anlage 23/43.*

[6] Rad, Rommel to *Comando Supremo,* 2230, 18 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1109.*

[7] (1) Msg, *Comando Supremo* to Rommel and von Arnim, 2115, 18 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1113/1.* (2) Msg, *OB SOUTH, O Qu* to *Panzer Army Rommel,* 2030, 18 Feb 43, *ibid., Anlage 1113/2.*

[8] Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass,* pp. 353–54.

Kesselring believed, and von Arnim feared, that this ambiguous order left Rommel free to begin his operation with a full-scale attack on Tébessa. But, Rommel, anxious to avoid delay and believing that he had been directed to make Le Kef instead of Tébessa the first objective of his drive to the north, was convinced that it would require the bulk of his mobile forces to reach Le Kef quickly. He ordered them to concentrate for an advance on a direct, northwesterly axis to Le Kef, either through Kasserine Pass or Sbiba, depending on which was found to be less firmly held.

Rommel ordered his commanders to launch the initial phase of the attack at first light on the 19th. The *21st Panzer Division,* starting at 0800 along the road from Sbeïtla, was to try out the Sbiba gap with Ksour, fifty miles north on the road to Le Kef, as its objective. *Kampfgruppe DAK* was to strike into the Kasserine pass in an attempt to clear it in one swift push. Rommel ordered the *10th Panzer Division* to return immediately from the Pichon–Kairouan area to Sbeïtla, reserving its subsequent commitment for decision until he could determine the relative progress at Sbiba gap and Kasserine pass. Mobile elements of the *Centauro Division* were called up from Gafsa, and ordered to strike toward Tébessa from the southeast. While *Kampfgruppe DAK* had decided to probe the southernmost opening through the Western Dorsal at El Ma el Aboid rather than the more difficult approach through Dernaïa–Bon Chebka, Rommel directed *Centauro* to crack open the latter pass. It was to be supported by a detachment from *Kampfgruppe DAK* which was to circle around Djebel Chambi (1544) and assault the defenders from the rear. The field marshal planned to open his command post south of Fériana at noon, 19 February, and subsequently move nearer the main effort when its area had been determined.[9]

On Rommel's urgent request *Comando Supremo* during the night of 19–20 February followed up its directive with an order for reorganization of command. Under the designation *Group Rommel,* the field marshal was to command the combined forces of the *First Italian Army* (General Messe), charged with the defense of the Mareth Position, and a force comprising *10th Panzer, 21st Panzer Division,* and *DAK* (*Angriffsgruppe Nord*); the latter he personally led in the battle now under way. The change, long overdue, went into effect at 0600 on 20 February.[10]

Early in the morning, 19 February, Kesselring flew to Tunisia to confer with von Arnim in order to guarantee that everything possible would be done to make the Axis offensive succeed. Kesselring had ample reason for being apprehensive. While he was absent from Rome *Fifth Panzer Army*'s report of operations had led *OB SOUTH* to believe that the *10th Panzer Division* (not the *21st Panzer Division*) had captured Sbeïtla, and consequently, that *Group Ziegler* was concentrated in that vicinity.[11] Only after German air reconnaissance had also reported a large-scale movement near Fondouk gap, which turned out to be that of the *10th Panzer Division,* did von Arnim's

[9] Telephone orders, Rommel to Lt Col Stolbeck, *DAK,* Lt Col Pomptow, *Fifth Panzer Army,* and *Div Centauro,* all 19 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlagen 1114/1, 2, 3, 4* and *1121/1, 2, 3* and *1122/1.* The operation was named *STURMFLUT.*

[10] *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlagen 1123, 1124, 1125.*

[11] Evening Rpt, *Comando Supremo to OKW/WFSt,* 17 Feb 43, copy in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt, Lagemeldungen Ob. Sued–Cdo. Supremo, 1.I.–28.II. 1943.*

headquarters report its withdrawal. *OB SOUTH* immediately ordered the movement stopped, but the damage had been done.[12]

Kesselring's flying visit to Tunisia on 19 February was therefore designed to ensure prompt execution of *Comando Supremo's* directive. Kesselring found that von Arnim had interpreted the directive to read that *Group Rommel* ". . . was to break through [the Allied front] between Le Kef and Tébessa . . ." and that he expected Rommel to move on Tébessa with his main forces. Therefore von Arnim had prepared a counterproposal which he felt would bring decisive success, provided the necessary means of combat and supply could be made available. He wanted to bring to bear on the Allies a concentric attack toward Le Kef, and thence down the Medjerda river, with Bédja as the objective. Such an attack, he argued, would insure complete surprise. In execution, the *21st Panzer Division* was to attack from Sbeïtla, and the *10th Panzer Division* from Pichon. The drive, moving closer to the Axis supply base than Rommel's expected advance on Tébessa, would engage all the Allied forces; it would permit participation by all Axis forces rather than by only the mobile elements. He felt the operation would subject co-ordination of Allied command to a severe test, and that ". . . it alone [would] ensure the complete liberation of Tunisia." Rommel's plan, he argued, would merely force the Allies to fall back toward their principal centers of supply, much as the British had done in Egypt.

Kesselring unequivocally rejected von Arnim's concept. The Commander in Chief, South, had intended a wide envelopment of the main Allied forces including Tébessa as well as Le Kef as essential objectives. Not until later was he to find out that his directive, as worded by *Comando Supremo,* had failed to make this intention clear to Field Marshal Rommel.[13]

The Allied Line in the South

Defense of the new Allied line brought American, British, and French troops to each of the areas of possible penetration, moves which required much hasty adjustment of the front and of the chain of command. By the morning of 19 February, when *Group Rommel* began to probe at Sbiba and Kasserine passes, a considerable force of Allied troops had already assembled at both places. (*Map VIII*)

Sbiba was in the zone of the French XIX Corps commanded by General Koeltz. The British 6th Armoured Division opened its headquarters at Rohia, nine miles north of Sbiba, at 2000, 18 February, to control the defense of Koeltz's southwestern sector, while directly under First Army. On the same night one component of that division, the Headquarters, 26th Armoured Brigade (Brig. C. A. L. Dunphie), shifted from Sbiba to Thala, with part of its subordinate units. Another element, the British 1st Guards Brigade, with the U.S. 18th Combat Team (1st Infantry Division), and the U.S. 34th Infantry Division coming into the line, remained to hold Sbiba gap. The 18th Combat Team's three battalions took up positions east of the Sbeïtla–Sbiba road.

[12] (1) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB IV,* 18 Feb 43. (2) MS # D–309 (Deichmann). (3) MS # C–075 (Kesselring).

[13] (1) Mins of confs between Kesselring, von Arnim, and others, 19 and 20 Feb 43, in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB IV.* (2) MS #C–075 (Kesselring). (3) MS #T–3–P II (Kesselring), Pt. 2.

Before daylight the 133d and 135th Infantry of the 34th Division, supported by three artillery battalions, extended that line along a ridge southeast of Sbiba. The 18th Combat Team had been placed under General Ryder's command. In general support were the 16/5 Lancers and elements of the 72d and 93d British Antitank Regiments, Royal Artillery. The French Light Armored Brigade and a Detachment Guinet maintained roadblocks between Sbiba and Rohia.[14]

At Thala, Brigadier Dunphie's force concentrated during the night of 18–19 February in a key area for opposing the enemy's main effort. He planned to provide reserves at either Sbiba or Kasserine pass, or at any secondary pass which the enemy might attempt to envelop. At 0600, 19 February, his command passed to the control of U.S. II Corps, although its commitment in battle was subject to specific prior approval by General Anderson.[15]

On 19 February, General Fredendall's corps was split into three forces along the Western Dorsal with a fourth in a supporting position on the south flank and a fifth being brought into position during the following night. (1) At Kasserine pass was Stark Force, a miscellaneous aggregation under the command of Colonel Stark, commanding officer of the 26th Infantry. His own 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, the U.S. 33d Field Artillery Battalion, and elements of the U.S. 19th Combat Engineers Regiment had been moved into the pass under command of Colonel Moore on 17–18 February, with the 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and a battery of the French 67th African Artillery (75-mm.). Reinforcements, moving toward the pass by various routes, arrived on 19–20 February while the battle was in progress. (2) Northwest of Fériana, guarding the Dernaïa position with the routes from Fériana to Tébessa through Bou Chebka, was an American and French force commanded by General Welvert. It included the U.S. 1st Ranger Battalion; the 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry; the U.S. 36th and 175th Field Artillery Battalions; Company D, 16th Armored Engineer Battalion; Company B, 19th Combat Engineers; Battery A, 213th Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion; three battalions of French infantry and four batteries of French artillery. (3) At the extreme southwestern flank, south of El Ma el Abiod, was Bowen Force. It was backed by the U.S. 1st Armored Division.[16]

On the night of 18–19 February, General Fredendall gave 1st Armored Division the mission: (1) to act defensively to protect Tébessa against attacks from the south and southwest; (2) to place mine fields and cover with artillery fire the passes at Kasserine, Dernaïa, and El Ma el Abiod northwest of Fériana; and (3) to co-ordinate defense with the 3d Battalion, 26th Combat Team (reinforced), known as Bowen Force, and with the Derbyshire Yeomanry, and be ready to counterattack southeast to restore the Dernaïa position, if it should be penetrated. General Ward instructed Generals Robinett and McQuillin to prepare plans and conduct the reconnaissance necessary

[14] (1) 133d and 135th Inf Hists, 1943. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (3) XIX Corps Jnl, 17–19 Feb 43.

[15] Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. Dunphie's command included Headquarters, 26th Armoured Brigade; the 2d Battalion, Lothians; 10th Battalion, Royal Buffs (—); 17/21 Lancers (—); Squadron A, 56th Reconnaissance Regiment; engineers, and smaller artillery and antitank units.

[16] Msg L–1, Liaison Officer First Army (Boye) to Fairfield (Truscott) and FREEDOM, 20 Feb 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log.



TERRAIN AT KASSERINE PASS, *looking southeast.*

to make such a counterattack upon further orders.[17]

The Terrain at Kasserine Pass

Viewed from the air Kasserine pass is shaped like a crude capital X. It is one of the three major gaps in the southwestern projection of the Grand Dorsal (the others are at Sbiba and Dernaïa). The defile at Kasserine at its narrowest point is about one mile wide. The axis of movement through the pass is that of the Hatab river, which flows from northwest to southeast down a gentle grade through the Bahiret Foussana valley and Kasserine pass. To one approaching from Kasserine village, the entrance is

[17] (1) Memo, Gen Fredendall to CG 1st Armd Div, 18 Feb 43, in CCB AAR, 22–27 Feb 43. (2) FO # 6, 1st Armd Div, 1300, 19 Feb 43, in 1st Armd Div History, Vol. V.

marked by a rocky spur of Djebel Chambi at the southwestern corner and, more than three miles to the north, by the rounded contours of Djebel Semmama (1356). These mountains converge to a narrows about four miles northwest of the entrance, while the triangular floor of the pass between them rises steadily over gently undulating ground. A road and a narrow-gauge railroad cross this area to the hamlet of Bordj Chambi, at which the road forks, one part branching to the left to reach Tébessa; the other, like the railroad, traversing the Hatab river and then continuing to Thala. Long shoulders extend into the pass from the mountain heights northeast and southwest of it but they are not exactly opposite each other nor in any respect symmetrical.

The rising shoulder of Djebel Semmama has several flattened knolls at successively higher altitudes. Transverse ridges extend from these knolls down the sides of the shoulder to the floor of the valley. A force approaching from either Kasserine or Thala could work its way up long draws adjacent to these ridges to achieve the summits of the knolls. To attain Hill 1191, the one next below the main southern height of Djebel Semmama, would require a hard climb of more than a mile, but the hilltop dominates those below it and gives an unimpeded view for many miles over the roads approaching the pass from either end.

The main projection into the pass from Djebel Chambi on the southwestern side is about half a mile farther from the Kasserine entrance and more than two miles from the top of Hill 1191. As one approaches from Kasserine it looks like a long ridge which drops to the floor of the pass much more gradually than Djebel Semmama. From Bordj Chambi, however, it is recognizable as a steep-sided curving ridge on the south side of the pass's western exit, a ridge extended by several small low hills with which it may once have been connected before erosion cut openings between them. The projection is sufficiently distinguishable from the main mass of Djebel Chambi to be separately named Djebel Zebbeus (812).

The unpaved road to Tébessa passes along the base of Djebel Zebbeus in a defile lying between that mountain and low hills on the northern side. Here in effect is a subordinate pass within the main Kasserine gap. The black-top road to Thala runs close to the base of Djebel Semmama and, like the Tébessa route, passes through a short inner defile created by another low hill. The throat of the pass and the valleys at each end of it are bisected by the Hatab river. Its channel on the Kasserine end is broad and shallow, but within the throat and across the valley northwest of it, the stream zigzags in a wadi which is often deep, with sheer sides, and is very difficult to cross. Moreover, the main wadi is fringed with draws and gullies through which short streams drain into the Hatab from the mountains. The scrub growth at the water's edge and the cultivated fields and groves of a few scattered farms near the river make a pattern of dark green against the brownish-gray pastel of the sparse vegetation that covers the clay soil. In the pass itself, much of the underlying rock is exposed and the rest is very thinly covered. In the valley to the northwest, large patches of cactus abound.

As one leaves Djebel Zebbeus on the road to Tébessa, one travels a route which extends west-northwest for some fifteen miles to Djebel el Hamra (1112) at the far edge of the Bahiret Foussana valley. The road

skirts the northern edge of a rough area, almost one third of the valley, which tips northward from the mountain mass west of Djebel Chambi toward the Hatab river. In effect this area resembles a gigantic, crudely corrugated shed roof draining into a badly bent and twisted gutter. The remainder of the valley is a much more level basin, and its surface is correspondingly wet and spongy in such a rainy month as February 1943. The road to Thala bends northward around the westernmost tip of Djebel Semmama, six miles north of Djebel Zebbeus, and passes from view behind low ridges.

The Bahiret Foussana valley is ringed except at the northeastern portion by mountains with crests rising from 3,000 to 4,000 feet above sea level. Along the southern edge, between Djebel Chambi and Djebel el Hamra, are Djebel Nogueza (1127) and the eastern end of Djebel es Sif (1352). On the northern side are Djebel el Adjered (1385) at the west and Djebel Bireno (1419) at the east. A wide opening between Djebel Bireno and Djebel Semmama is used by the Kasserine–Thala–Tadjerouïne–Le Kef road. The main Kasserine–Tébessa dirt road skirts Djebel el Hamra to lead directly westward over the Algerian border to Tébessa. Running north and south along the base of Djebel el Hamra is a section of the narrow dirt track connecting Haïdra, thirteen miles west of Thala, with Bou Chebka, a village on the plateau southwest of Djebel Chambi, about halfway between Fériana and Tébessa. Other tracks cross the Bahiret Foussana valley, using fords over the Hatab river, and pushing up the draws and through openings in the mountain rim. The American troops created much confusion by renaming this area the "Kasserine Valley," despite the fact that Kasserine lies in another valley of its own. The area into which one emerges after leaving Kasserine behind and coming through the Kasserine pass cannot very logically also be considered as the Kasserine Valley.

Kasserine pass is not impregnable, perhaps, but it offers such advantages to defense that a sufficient force could exact an exorbitant price from a foe determined to take it at all costs. Through possession of the heights on either side, an elementary requirement of any such defense, troops can dominate the triangular area of approach from the Kasserine side. That area lacks cover; any force attempting to take the heights could probably be readily detected, and one seeking to push into the throat of the pass by moving along the valley floor has to come under flanking fire from one side or the other. The pass is at an elevation of some 2,000 feet, between crests which tower about 2,000 feet higher still, so that winter clouds and mist limit visibility. Nevertheless, since the opening is less than a mile wide, an attacking force could not escape observation; in fact, it could be restricted by mine fields to areas still narrower and covered by prearranged fires. Even before attackers reached the throat of the pass from the east, they could gain control over the road fork from the defenders, thus denying them the best roadway between one side of the pass and the other, although a secondary track does connect the two roads about half a mile farther into the narrows. The wadi of the Hatab river splits the steadily widening area northwest of the throat into two sections. Advance along either fork of the road at first leaves an attacking force vulnerable to flanking fire from the other side of the pass, but shortly thereafter takes the force out of range. The two subordinate defiles through which each branch of the

road then runs are critical points which cannot be bypassed by vehicles and at which an adequate defense force can exact a drastic toll from any enemy which has penetrated thus far. But such a defense force, to be successful, must be both strong and well co-ordinated if it is to take full advantage of the possibilities of mutual support from either side of the Hatab.

The Defense of Kasserine Pass, 19 February

An enemy demonstration in front of the eastern entrance of Kasserine pass during the evening of 18 February convinced General Fredendall that an attack was imminent. From Tebéssa he telephoned Colonel Stark at El Ma el Abiod at 2000 hours and said:

"I want you to go to Kasserine right away and pull a Stonewall Jackson. Take over up there."

"You mean tonight, General?" asked Colonel Stark.

"Yes, immediately; stop in my CP on the way up," was the answer.[18]

Before morning, Colonel Stark had assumed command of the provisional force, directly in the case of the infantry from his regiment along the Thala road, and indirectly through Colonel Moore of the reinforced 19th Combat Engineers on the other side of the gap.[19]

The first defensive organization in Kasserine pass had been carried out by Colonel Moore, beginning with a small, mine-laying party on 16 February. He then shifted all units under his command from the line east of Kasserine village into the pass during the night of 17–18 February. He placed the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, astride the Thala road about two miles northwest of the fork in the pass, and his own unit on the southwestern side of the gap, from the Hatab river to Hill 812 (Djebel Zebbeus), on a line through Hill 712 and crossing the Tébessa road. His main line of resistance extended almost three miles and he held it with about 2,000 men. He planned to defend behind a triple belt of miles across the roads, by small arms and machine gun fire, and to hold the enemy's armored vehicles at the eastern approach to the pass by the fire of two batteries of 105-mm. howitzers of the 33d Field Artillery Battalion and one battery of towed French 75's. Patrols covering the high hills on the flanks would check infiltration while a reserve company on each side, plus the 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion, would protect the rear and throw back any of the enemy who had slipped past the patrols.[20]

Colonel Stark found these plans only partially realized when he assumed command in the pass at 0730, 19 February. A night of fog and rain left the whole area blanketed in mist. The actual situation is illustrated by the experience of a mine-laying party on the preceding night. An engineer lieutenant had been ordered at about 1930 hours to supervise the laying of a mine field in front of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, on the northern side of the pass. The engineers loaded the mines on a truck sent by the battalion, which was expected to furnish the force to install them. The officer went along

[18] 26th Inf AAR, 19–24 Feb. 43.

[19] Basic sources for the defense of Kasserine pass are: (1) AAR's of 1st Div, 26th Inf, 33d FA Bn, 19th Engr Regt, and II Corps. (2) *DAK, KTB,* 18–23 Feb 43. (3) *10th Panzer Div, Ic, Taetigkeitsbrericht,* 19–21 Feb 43.

[20] Msg, Col Moore to CG II Corps, 2002, 17 Feb 43; Memo, Moore for his troops, 8 Mar 43, sub: Kasserine pass defense; Overlay, Exhibit O, Disposition during Kasserine pass battle. 19th Engr Regt Hist Rcds, Oct 42–Jan 44.



105-MM. HOWITZER OF THE 33D FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION *in position, Kasserine Pass area, 20 February 1943.*

with the mine-laden truck and after midnight arrived at Headquarters, Company C, 26th Infantry, where he tried to locate the mine-laying force. Unable to find anyone at the command post who knew anything about the matter, on their advice he set out along the road toward Kasserine in the belief that he might there discover someone with the necessary information. A trip of a few miles toward the enemy did not bring about such a meeting, so he returned, roused the company commander, and at about 0330, was joined by a detail under an infantry lieutenant. The latter had no idea where the mine field should go, or whether it was to be covered by fire. The engineer lieutenant, who had never seen the terrain in daylight, had to select the site and then had to instruct the troops in the methods of laying and arming the mines. The infantry had no implements for excavation except their short-handled intrenching tools, which were of little avail on the road and in the rocky soil on either side of it. In the end, to get the task done before daylight, the detail merely strewed the mines unburied across a gap about 100 yards wide, from a hill on one side of the road to an embankment on the other.[21]

On the morning of 19 February, Colonel Stark set up his command post about three miles back of the narrows and quickly realized that the proportion of forces sent to the heights on either side of the pass was insufficient. By the time Colonel Akers of the G–3 Section, II Corps, arrived at 1000 to check the situation, enemy 88-mm. shells were already falling near Stark's tent. The 3d Battalion, 39th Infantry (9th Infantry

[21] Memo by 1st Lt Edwin C. Dryden, 20 May 43, in 19th Engr Regt Hist Rcds, Oct 42–Jan 44.

Division), was on its way to the pass. Company I, 13th Armored Regiment, was in reserve near the Tébessa road and available. The British 26th Armoured Brigade (–) at Thala might be committed if First Army approved. With the strength of the enemy unknown, it was uncertain whether existing Allied forces would be able to hold out until prospective reinforcements could be put into position.

At 1015, thirty-five to forty truckloads of enemy infantry were observed unloading southeast of the pass and making for the heights. A little after noon, some French troops reported to the command post that they saw German soldiers scaling the steep slopes on both sides of the pass. Colonel Stark had just reported to General Fredendall that the enemy's fire in the pass indicated either that he was feeling out the defenses or in a preliminary stage of an actual attack. Now, in view of the report of the French troops, there could be little doubt. The attack was on.[22]

Rommel had sent the *33d Reconnaissance Battalion* to seize the pass, if possible at daybreak, by a sudden, surpise attack. The defenders were on the alert and much too strongly established to be driven out by such a small force. *Kampfgruppe DAK* then took over the mission. *Group Menton,* consisting of two battalions of the veteran *Panzer Grenadier Regiment Afrika,* supported by the corps artillery and antiaircraft units, took up the attack. The *2d Battalion, Panzer Grenadier Regiment Africa,* started up the mountainside to gain control of the shoulder of Djebel Semmama, while the main body moved along the floor of the pass near its base. The enemy took Hill 974, one of the prominent knolls part way up the shoulder, but could not continue down the mountain's western face under the severe fire which came from the direction of the lower hills northwest of the road fork at Bordj Chambi. On the floor of the pass Colonel Menton's *1st Battalion* pushed past Bordj Chambi and penetrated the narrows about as far as the Wadi Zebbeus before being stopped by artillery fire. The absence of the air support to which the enemy infantry were accustomed and the low effectiveness of German counterbattery fire under conditions of poor visibility reduced the power of the attack. To push beyond the positions thus far reached, General Buelowius now decided to commit the *1st Battalion, 8th Panzer Regiment* (*Group Stotten*). At about the same time that Colonel Stark was informing General Fredendall that a strong attack might be beginning, Field Marshal Rommel was surveying the situation with General Buelowius near the southeastern entrance of the pass. He intended, he then said, to make his main attack through Sbiba and northward. At Kasserine pass he wished to gain control only in order to make a feint toward Tébessa and to bar Allied use of the opening while he was striking farther east. General Buelowius expressed confidence that his forces would win the pass before the end of the day.[23]

Allied reinforcements began arriving in the pass early in the afternoon. Colonel Stark sent Company I, 39th Infantry, to the highest ground in the center of the pass; Company L, 39th Infantry, to reinforce Company A, 26th Infantry, on the extreme north flank at Hill 1191 on Djebel Sem-

[22] (1) CT 26 Unit Jnl, 19–24 Feb 43, in 26th Inf AAR, 11 Nov 42–14 Apr 43, 23 Apr 43. (2) Interv with Lt Col Russell F. Akers, Jr., 27 Jul 49.

[23] *DAK, KTB,* 19 Feb 43.



GENERAL GRANT MEDIUM TANK M3 *of the 13th Armored Regiment, Kasserine Pass area, 20 February 1943.*

mama; and he split Company K, 39th Infantry, between the two other companies. The 26th Infantry regimental band and five tanks of Company I, 13th Armored Regiment, were placed in supporting positions along the road to Thala, where they guarded against enemy encirclement from the shoulder of Djebel Semmama to the valley and thence down the road from Thala toward the road fork. The remainder of Company I's tanks and the mobile guns of the 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion waited near the defile on the Tébessa road, with four mobile 75's of the 26th Infantry Cannon Company. These dispositions were partly executed before the enemy's attack was resumed at 1530 and partly after it had begun.[21]

[21] 26th Inf AAR, 11 Nov 42–14 Apr 43, 23 Apr 43.

The afternoon attack came northwestward along the Tébessa road between the road fork and the narrow gap at the base of Djebel Zebbeus. Wadi Zebbeus, a tributary running eastward from the base of Djebel Chambi to the Hatab river, flows under this road about half a mile from the road fork. The enemy tanks and infantry drove northward across this stream bed as far as an American mine field against considerable machine gun and antitank fire from a low hill (712) and from Djebel Zebbeus, as well as from artillery farther back. Five German tanks were knocked out at the mine field while the 19th Engineers, reinforced, fought stubbornly on ground cut by ravines and low ridges. One company of enemy mountain troops tried to climb along the high ground south of the Tébessa road, above Hill 812, with a view to enveloping

the American right flank. It was driven off. On the other side of the pass, the enemy retained Hill 974 against several attempts to dislodge him, but could not exploit possession of that vantage point while American fire could be poured from Hill 712 against the exposed slope above the Thala road, although some infiltration to the road took place late in the afternoon. Toward evening a detachment of Menton's *2d Battalion* pushed higher up the shoulder of Djebel Semmama, reaching Hill 1191 after nightfall. The enemy had captured about 100 Americans before breaking off the main attack at dusk.[25]

The enemy had observed some withdrawal along the Tébessa road during the afternoon which he thought might indicate an intention to abandon the pass. He sent strong patrols under orders to keep in close contact during the night, and placed his infantry well forward with a view to prompt pursuit, but withdrew the tank battalion into bivouac southeast of Djebel Chambi. During the night *DAK* was reinforced by a battalion of tanks of the *Italian 131st (Centauro) Armored Division* and the *5th Bersaglieri Battalion,* which came up from the Fériana–Thélepte area.

Colonel Stark's improvised force had grown enough during the afternoon to frustrate the enemy's expectation that he could take the pass in one day and with the forces thus far committed. Stark remained rather hopeful that he could hold the pass in spite of some ominous developments late in the day. He asked General Fredendall at 2035 hours for armored and tank destroyer units, as well as for infantry and artillery, and for air support in the morning. He moved his command post to a site where enemy artillery fire would not keep breaking his wire communications back to II Corps. Late in the afternoon, Brigadier Dunphie and some of his officers of the British 26th Armoured Brigade drove from Thala to reconnoiter the pass, where they thought they might be committed. Dunphie regarded Stark's situation as unsatisfactory and deteriorating. Stark could not furnish sufficient precise information about the conditions along his front, and it seemed to Dunphie that he lacked adequate control. The enemy had already infiltrated between Stark's command post and part of his forces, and might be expected to build up at that soft spot during the night. The Americans had no reserves with which to counterattack against a break-through or a substantial infiltration. The situation at the pass seemed to Dunphie to justify committing his armored command to clear it up, and he so recommended to British First Army.[26]

Brigadier McNabb, General Anderson's chief of staff, investigated the situation in the pass and rejected Dunphie's recommendation. He limited the force released from Thala to a detachment of eleven tanks, one company of motorized infantry, one battery of artillery, and a small unit of antitank guns, which was placed under the command of Lt. Col. A. C. Gore, 10th Battalion, Royal Buffs and sent to the northwestern corner of the pass about 0400, 20 February. When Stark supported a proposal to have the rest of the armored brigade near the pass, as insurance rather than because he thought they would have to be committed, Brigadier McNabb stood by his earlier decision. He considered that Stark's line was

[25] (1) 19th Engr Regt (C), Hist Rcds, Oct 42–Jan 44. (2) *DAK, KTB,* 19 Feb 43.

[26] (1) Memo by General Dunphie, Sep 51, supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (2) *DAK, KTB,* 19 Feb 43. (3) CT 26 Unit Jnl, in 26th Inf AAR, 11 Nov 42–14 Apr 43.

too far west for the British armored units to be of much help, and expressed his belief that although Stark had enough troops to "handle things as they are," he did not seem to have a "grip on things." Moreover, he believed that something might develop near Sbiba which would require Dunphie's unit there. Stark therefore prepared to provide American infantry and artillery support for an advance southeastward along the Thala road by Colonel Gore's detachment in the morning. The 3d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry (Lt. Col. W. W. Wells), came under Colonel Stark's command during the early morning.[27]

What happened during the night of 19–20 February cannot be clearly reconstructed from the record. After dark the enemy advanced to the northwest as far as the Thala road at Hill 704 but was then driven back. On the slopes of Djebel Semmama the American line was enveloped or pierced, so that Company A, 26th Infantry, was cut off, its commander was captured for a time, and the other companies went out of battalion control. Stragglers reported the situation after daylight on 20 February, a second foggy morning. The 19th Combat Engineers (reinforced) on the other side of the Hatab river spent a night under steady pressure from enemy patrols but apparently nothing like a persistent attack by a major force. It was 0830, 20 February, when the enemy resumed the offensive there. But before taking up the second day in Kasserine pass, where the enemy was operating under a revised plan, it is necessary to consider the action south of Sbiba gap on 19 February, for the outcome there led Rommel to a major decision during the night.[28]

The 21st Panzer Division *Is Stopped at Sbiba, 19 February*

The *21st Panzer Division* started north from Sbeïtla at 0900 on 19 February with its objective a road junction at Ksour. Its progress was uneventful until, shortly before noon, the point of the column arrived at a narrow belt of Allied mines across the road about six miles southeast of Sbiba. The attackers readily opened a gap while covering the operation with artillery fire against any Allied force on the higher ground to the northwest. A short advance then brought the column up against a much better laid mine field within the range of British artillery. Enemy observers, assisted by Arabs, could see the positions held by twenty Allied tanks, two battalions of artillery, and a considerable number of infantry on the high ground on either side of the road, three to four miles farther north. While the main column stopped, one armored battalion with twenty-five tanks from *5th Panzer Regiment* and some truck-borne infantry attempted a sweep to the east out of range of the British artillery and then northward against the U.S. 18th Combat Team. A detachment of the British 16/5 Lancers tried to move within range to deter the attack but lost four of its light tanks to the longer-range guns of the enemy's vehicles. The Germans brought up several batteries of light field howitzers, emplaced them, and began counterbattery and preparation fire on the Allied ridge positions while the in-

[27] (1) Phone Conv, McNabb, Dunphie, and Hewitt, 20 Feb 43, Entry 345, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (3) CT 26 Unit Jnl, in 26th Inf AAR, 11 Nov 42–14 Apr 43, 23 Apr 43. (4) 26th Inf Hist.

[28] (1) II Corps AAR, 2 May 43. (2) Interv with Col Akers, 27 Jul 49. (3) 26th Inf AAR, 23 Apr 43. (4) *DAK, KTB,* 19–20 Feb 43.

fantry (*104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment*) got ready to attack.

At about this juncture, Field Marshal Rommel arrived at Colonel Hildebrandt's command post to ascertain the course of his operations and to urge an all-out, concentrated attack for a break-through rather than the cautious more dispersed frontal attack which seemed in prospect. Colonel Hildebrandt's attack stopped short without his infantry's ever being committed. He lost ten to twelve tanks, for the U.S. 151st Field Artillery Battalion and the other American artillery units supporting the 34th Infantry Division had platted more than 100 concentrations and fired on the enemy tanks with the benefit of good observation. British engineers went out after dark and demolished seven of the enemy's vehicles, while Colonel Hildebrandt pulled back his armored unit behind a defensive line of infantry, sent the *580th Reconnaissance Battalion* to the eastern flank, and covered the west flank by the *609th Flak Battalion*. The Americans used the night to lay mines and barbed wire in front of their line in expectation of an attack on the next day.[29]

The successful defense at both Kasserine and Sbiba passes on 19 February obliged Rommel to review his original plan to commit the *10th Panzer Division* through Sbiba toward Ksour and Le Kef, while merely sealing Kasserine pass behind a feint toward Tébessa. He decided that the prospects at Kasserine pass were better. General von Broich's *10th Panzer Division*, which he had ordered back from the Pichon–Kairouan area, therefore received instructions to continue through Sbeïtla to Kasserine. It was then to pass through *Kampfgruppe DAK* in Kasserine pass and proceed northward toward Thala. *DAK*, having opened the pass, was to continue northwestward to Djebel el Hamra, seize the passes there, and leave defensive elements facing west. In execution of these plans the *10th Panzer Division* was to have assembled at Kasserine village by daybreak on 20 February. The division was at only half strength because important elements, notably its heavy panzer battalion (including Tiger tanks), remained committed in von Arnim's sector. Delayed by poor roads and bad weather the division did not arrive at Kasserine village at the time specified. As late as the night of the 19th its advance elements had got only as far as Sbeïtla.[30] Rommel's decision thus to employ the *10th Panzer Division* in the western wing of his attack rather than to commit it nearer the *21st Panzer Division* was in conformity with his directive from *Comando Supremo*, which specified that the greater weight should fall there, and in agreement with the tactical situation, which promised quicker success at Kasserine pass.

The Loss of Kasserine Pass, 20 February

The Allied defense at Kasserine pass on 20 February began with the advance at first light by Colonel Gore's small armored force from a ridge about 6 miles northwest of the road fork in the pass. He moved toward the main defensive line on the Thala side of the narrows. There he supported the remaining American elements and sent his squadron of light tanks forward on reconnaissance to-

[29] (1) *21st Panzer Div, KTB, 1.I.–31.III.43*, 19 Feb 43. (2) 133d Inf Hist, 7 Jun 43, and, in particular, AT Co 133d Inf Hist, Jan–Jun 43. (3) Interv with Brig Gen Benjamin F. Caffey, Jr., 21 Feb 43. (4) Journal de Marche de la Brigade Légère Mécanique (Light Armored Brigade), 19 Feb 43. Photostat in OCMH.

[30] (1) *DAK, KTB*, 19 Feb 43. (2) *Panzer Army Africa, KTB 2*, 19–20 Feb 43.



MEN OF THE 894TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION *on reconnaissance at Kasserine Pass on the Kasserine–Thala road.*

ward the road fork. At the same time, Colonel Stark sent the 3d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, climbing up the southwestern slopes of Djebel Semmama to surmount the shoulder at Hill 1191. It was expected to protect the northern flank, and to re-establish contact with Company A, U.S. 26th Infantry, and the other units on the northern flank. The 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Lt. Col. Charley P. Eastburn) was sent forward by II Corps during the early morning, 20 February, to be in position to counterattack against a breakthrough at the pass.[31]

General Buelowius sent into the assault at 0830, 20 February, both battalions of *Panzer Grenadier Regiment Africa,* supported by all his field artillery and dual-purpose 88-mm. guns, plus a battery of new German rocket projectors which had been brought up during the night. Once the road to Tébessa had been opened, the two armored battalions (*1st Battalion, 8th Panzer Regiment* and that of *Division Centauro*) and a reconnaissance battalion would also be committed. The leading elements of the *10th Panzer Division* were temporarily held east of Kasserine village until needed. The attack on the right was weakened by the necessity of preventing part of the 3d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, on the upper slopes of Djebel Semmama from regaining possession of Hill 1191 and adjacent knolls from German detachments, and then turning against the attacking German infantry in the narrows. The extremely difficult terrain west of Hill 712, and accurate artillery

[31] (1) Msg, Hewitt to Eastburn, 0505, 20 Feb 43, Entry 348, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) CT 26 Jnl, in 26th Inf AAR, 23 Apr 43. (3) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (4) 6th Armd Inf AAR, 2 Sep 43. (5) *DAK, KTB,* 20 Feb 43.

and mortar fire, slowed down the *1st Battalion, Panzer Grenadier Regiment Africa,* and the *5th Bersaglieri Battalion* attacking on the left. Rommel himself appeared in that area in the forenoon with Buelowius and von Broich, and he ordered up infantry reinforcements to the strength of almost two battalions. Finally he also committed the motorcycle battalion of the *10th Panzer Division* to expedite the attack along the Thala road. Rommel believed that he had to break through quickly at all costs, for if he were to prolong the attack until night, the rate of the Allied build-up would rob him of the opportunity for subsequent exploitation. He therefore eventually ordered all available elements of both Buelowius' and von Broich's commands to make a side-by-side attack at 1630, 20 February. The *10th Panzer Division* would be on the right, its two battalions of armored infantry pushing over Hill 974 and turning west onto the valley floor behind the Allied line. *Kampfgruppe DAK* on the southwest, would thrust along the Tébessa road and would also push infantry over the rough ground onto Hill 812 and to the high ground northeast of it. The concentration of German artillery support would be extraordinarily high.[32]

Long before this attack began, it seemed to the defenders that the enemy was moving forward relentlessly and successfully. In fact, just before noon an enemy column penetrated between two of Colonel Moore's companies, and shortly afterward, observers spotted enemy tanks and infantry getting through the mine field on the Tébessa road. By noon, Colonel Moore's command post had been overrun and his command was falling back. The eight medium tanks of Company I, 13th Armored Regiment, had been placed astride this road, near the inner defile, with elements of the 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion nearby. Radio communications between the tanks had broken down and none existed with Colonel Stark's headquarters or with the tank destroyers. Communication was by courier and was infrequent. As the enemy tanks began getting through the mines, the American artillery was sent farther back. The French, after running out of ammunition, disabled their 75's and abandoned them. The tank destroyers moved out and, after being held in position for some time, so did the tanks. Although the defense crumbled, it persisted and in fact still seemed strong to the enemy.

The enemy's afternoon attack finally cleared the pass. The two battalions of *Panzer Grenadier Regiment Africa,* the *5th Bersaglieri Battalion,* two armored infantry battalions, and the motorcycle battalion of the *10th Panzer Division,* supported by five battalions of artillery extending from one side of the pass to the other, moved methodically northwestward. They opened the road to Tébessa first. The armored battalion from the *Centauro Division* in a five-mile pursuit along that road could find no Allied troops.

On the northern side of the pass, the valiant stand of Colonel Gore's detachment forced General Buelowius to commit his *1st Battalion, 8th Panzer Regiment,* to force the break-through. The British fought until their last tank was destroyed. Casualties were severe. Gore's unit bore the brunt of the full-scale afternoon attack and withdrew, with five American tank destroyers of the 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion, past

[32] (1) *DAK, KTB,* 20 Feb 43. (2) *10th Panzer Div, KTB,* 20 Feb 43.

the northwestern entrance point (Hill 704) at dusk. When the enemy's tanks also overran a platoon of Company I, U.S. 13th Armored Regiment, the 3d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, and elements of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, and 3d Battalion, 39th Infantry, were cut off on Djebel Semmama. All the troop carriers of the armored infantry waiting in their park near the base of the mountain were endangered. The drivers hastily took out as many vehicles as possible along the wadies, leaving the scattered remnants of the battalion to infiltrate westward through the enemy across the Bahiret Foussana valley and northward through the Thala area. The enemy was amazed at the quantity and quality of the American equipment captured more or less intact.[33]

At noon, 20 February, Kesselring visited Rommel's advanced command post northwest of Kasserine in the broad entrance to the pass. The two field marshals agreed that the Axis forces must break out of the pass during the day if the operation was to succeed. En route back to Rome Kesselring stopped at the Tunis airdrome, where he summoned von Arnim to meet him. He found the latter still suspicious that Rommel intended to conduct his attack toward Tébessa rather than toward Le Kef, and he again urged that the whole *10th Panzer Division* be restored to his control, for operations in conjunction with the *21st Panzer Division*. It is Kesselring's later recollection, but not a matter of contemporary record, that he censured von Arnim for withholding important elements of the *10th Panzer Division* from Rommel, thus weakening the attack. Kesselring was later to attribute the Axis failure in part to von Arnim's departure from orders, although holding Rommel responsible for not having insisted on full compliance.[34]

Before taking off for Rome, Kesselring in agreement with General Gandin of *Comando Supremo*, ordered immediate diversionary attacks by *Fifth Panzer Army* toward Maktar, and prescribed that an armored battalion should be held in readiness near Pont-du-Fahs to exploit any success. "In order to guarantee coordination of these operations by unified command," he stated, "I shall recommend to *Comando Supremo* that Field Marshal Rommel assume command of *Fifth Panzer Army* in so far as elements of that army are, or will be, participating in the drive." He also ordered von Arnim to try to withdraw from the Medjerda sector those elements of *10th Panzer Division* that had been withheld from Rommel. The intention was to make them available for the main drive. Supply of *10th Panzer Division* would pass to Rommel's control forthwith.[35] Thus 21 February was to be a critical day in the battle for Tunisia.

[33] (1) II Corps AAR, 2 May 43. (2) First Army Sitrep, 1700, 20 Feb 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log. (3) 26th Inf AAR, 22 Apr 43. (4) DMC Jnl, 20 Feb 43. (5) 3d Bn Hist, 2 Sep 43, in 6th Armd Inf Hist. (6) 33d FA Bn AAR, 1 Mar 43. (7) *DAK, KTB*, 18–20 Feb 43. (8) Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass*, pp. 355ff. (9) 3d Bn Hist by Maj Harold F. Blodgett, 14 Oct 43, in 13th Armd Regt Hist.

[34] (1) But von Arnim insists that the elements he was accused of withholding were already in contact with Allied forces in the Medjerda valley, not in reserve, and that the *10th Panzer Division* was sent as it stood at the time orders were received. MS # C–094 (von Arnim). (2) MS # T–3–P II (Kesselring), Pt. 2. (3) MS # C–066 (Kesselring).

[35] *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB IV*, 20 Feb 43, and Msg, *Fifth Panzer Army* to *German-Italian Panzer Army*, 20 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1132*.

Allied Defenses in the Rear of Kasserine Pass

Significant countermeasures were begun on the night of 19–20 February by the Allies, when the course of the first day's defense of Kasserine pass had made precautionary steps seem desirable if not essential. General Anderson had ordered the U.S. 1st Infantry Division, less Combat Team 18 (at Sbiba) and Combat Team 26 (at several points), to shift from the Allied front in the Ousseltia–Maktar sector, under General Koeltz's command, to the vicinity of Bou Chebka, in General Fredendall's area. General Fredendall gave General Allen a rather broad mission—to control the defense of the area south of the Bahiret Foussana valley and along the Western Dorsal from Djebel Chambi to El Ma el Abiod, an area in which there were elements of the French Constantine Division (General Welvert) as well as various American and British units. On Allen's orders the 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, moved to the northern edge of the Bou Chebka plateau, where it established communication with Colonel Stark during 20 February. The remainder of the 16th Combat Team was also available. General Allen disposed the other units of his command for the defense of the many secondary routes through the mountains.

Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division (General Robinett), after being alerted during the previous night for possible movement from positions south of Tébessa, was ordered directly by II Corps at 1030, 20 February, to move immediately toward Thala via Tébessa and Haïdra. At this juncture, the enemy's success of the previous night on the northeastern side of the pass, including the seizure of Hill 1191, and perhaps other factors, made it seem likely that he might first thrust toward Thala. Robinett was instructed to assume command of Colonel Stark's troops as well as his own. At corps and higher headquarters, where the actual situation was not well understood, he was then expected to counterattack in the pass before the end of the day.[36]

During the afternoon of 20 February, another Allied defensive move of major importance was taken. Brigadier Dunphie's 26th Armoured Brigade (less 16/5 Lancers) established a defensive line on the road from Kasserine to Thala about nine miles north of the pass. He placed the 2d Lothians on the east, and the 17/21 Lancers on the west, and the 10th Royal Buffs in the center with field artillery in support. The 2d Battalion, 5th Leicestershire Regiment (46th Division), expected during the night, would dig in on a ridge astride the road about four miles south of Thala.

General Fredendall, his chief of staff, Col. John A. Dabney, and others reconnoitered toward the pass along this road late in the morning, 20 February, while General Robinett's command echelon, far ahead of Combat Command B's main column, continued through Thala toward the pass. When the two parties met south of Thala, Fredendall was returning, convinced that the enemy had broken through on the Tébessa road, having overrun the infantry and combat engineers there but not the artillery, tank destroyer, or tank units. His earlier plans for Robinett's force were no longer practicable. The new arrangements involved two

[36] (1) 1st Div G–3 Opns Rpt, 15 Jan–8 Apr 43. (2) Memo, 2d Bn 16th Inf in Kasserine pass action, attached to Ltr, Col Joseph B. Crawford to author, 27 Jun 51. (3) Msg, Porter to Rooks (signed Truscott), 20 Feb 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 133. (4) Robinett, Among the First, MS. In private possession. This memoir is a basic source for part of the action on 21–22 February 1943.

distinct defense forces. American troops would cover Tébessa; British units would defend Thala. General Robinett was to command all the troops in an undefined area south of the Hatab river and to defend the passes at Djebel el Hamra. He was to stop the enemy's advance toward Tébessa, then drive him back into the Kasserine pass, and eventually restore the Allied positions there. General Fredendall gave Brigadier Dunphie a similar mission with reference to Thala. He put Dunphie in command of all troops remaining on the north side of the Hatab, including Colonel Stark's forces, and expected him to use Stark's communications to II Corps. "For the co-ordination of this attack, Robinett comes under your command," General Fredendall informed Dunphie, who was in turn to be directly under U.S. II Corps. Direct communication between Robinett and Dunphie by liaison officer was arranged later in the day.[37]

The II Corps had in effect passed to Dunphie a responsibility which he lacked the means to carry out, requiring him not only to command his own force in battle but also to co-ordinate these operations on one side of the broad valley with Robinett's on the other, despite inadequate means of communication. The First Army, now convinced that the enemy's main effort would be made at Kasserine rather than Sbiba, inserted another link in the chain of command, designating Brig. Cameron Nicholson, second in command of the British 6th Armoured Division, to control, in behalf of II Corps, the operations of all the increasing number of units—British, American, and French—which were assembling south of Thala. His provisional organization was named "Nickforce." While Nicholson was struggling through the mire of a third-rate track from Rohia to Thala, Robinett and his operations officer, Lt. Col. Edwin A. Russell, Jr., attended a commanders' conference with Brigadier McNabb, Brigadier Dunphie, and others, at Thala at midnight 20–21 February. The conferees agreed on a plan of battle.[38] Dunphie would organize south of Thala; Robinett would cover the passes to Tébessa and Haïdra; both forces would await attack, and once the enemy was committed, both would counterattack, making their main efforts on their outer flanks. Allied tanks were to be conserved. The battle was to be fought mainly with other arms. Overlays were prepared, liaison arranged, and although the conference terminated before Brigadier Nicholson could reach Thala, he confirmed the plans upon his arrival at 0315. The initiative remained with Rommel but to retain it he would have to continue winning.[39]

[37] Msgs, CG II Corps to Col Stark, Brig Dunphie, and Gen Robinett, 20 Feb 43, Entries 419, 420, and 421, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[38] (1) CCB 1st Armd Div AAR, 1 Mar 43. (2) Info supplied by Brig Dunphie, Sep 51.

[39] (1) The II Corps disposed of 99 medium, 47 light, and 74 nonoperational tanks at 1900, 20 February. Msg, Maj W. B. Chase to Adv First Army, Entry 359, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) Robinett, Among the First, MS. In private possession. (3) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Enemy Is Turned Back

The continuation of a successful defense at Sbiba gap on 20 February enabled the Allies, like the enemy, to shift their main weight westward. The enemy tried on this second day at Sbiba to make a two-battalion infantry attack, with artillery support, on the Allied ridge positions, while sending his armor (thirty-three Mark III and six Mark IV tanks) with a battery of field artillery, on a wide sweep around the eastern flank. (*See Map VIII.*) The armor was to take the Allied ridge positions from the rear, and then envelop Sbiba and cut the road north of it. This plan was beset with difficulties and was executed, moreover, in a manner which seemed to the Allies peculiarly tentative and to the enemy's higher command distinctly reprehensible.

Fog and rain over the battle area and elsewhere in Tunisia deprived the *21st Panzer Division* of preparatory Stuka attacks or promised fighter-bomber support. It did not, on the other hand, prevent Allied artillery observers from adjusting fire with disturbing accuracy on German troops, vehicles, and batteries. The Germans found that the ground to be traversed was extremely difficult, with deep wadies and extensive soft areas, and they discovered that the route of advance designated for the armored force was impassable. The infantry, after being subjected to the artillery shelling, at noon came close enough to the Allied line on the ridge to be hit by small arms and mortar fire. Four enemy tanks penetrated the U.S. 34th Infantry Division's line before they were knocked out by antitank weapons. The rest were driven back. Although the enemy casualties were not high, the infantry attack came to a complete standstill, and the armor pulled back in the early afternoon. The whole day's offensive was ineffective and irresolute, mainly as a consequence of the devastating volume and accuracy of Allied artillery.[1]

Rommel ordered the *21st Panzer Division* to send the *580th Reconnaissance Battalion* during the night of 20–21 February to Kasserine pass for commitment there. He needed mobile troops. The *10th Panzer Division* had not been sent back from the Fondouk–Kairouan area intact. Only somewhat more than one half the division had reached the Kasserine area before nightfall, 20 February. The remainder, even if Rommel insisted on its coming, could not arrive in time for the next day's operations. At Sbiba, therefore, the *21st Panzer Division* was ordered to take up an active defense from a base line running between Kef el Korath (1100) on the north-

[1] (1) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (2) 135th Inf Hist, 1943. (3) 18th Inf AAR and Jnl, 16 Feb–9 Mar 43. (4) Nicholson, *The Grenadier Guards in War of 1939–1945*, II, 281–82. (5) Interv with Brig Gen Benjamin F. Caffey, Jr., 21 Feb 50. (6) *21st Panzer Div, KTB*, 19–20 Feb 43.

west and the tip of Djebel Mrhila (1378) on the southeast, at a distance from Sbiba village of five or more miles. Colonel Hildebrandt's division was to be ready for Allied counterattack. The division had about thirty operational tanks, two battalions of armored infantry, six batteries of field artillery, and two companies of antiaircraft artillery. To strengthen the Allied side, a provisional British tank unit equipped with twenty-five new Churchill tanks came to Sbiba from Le Kef during the night. Already concentrated there by 22 February were eight American and three British infantry battalions, three or more field artillery battalions, and other units.[2]

The Enemy Is Held on the Tébessa Road

The Kasserine battle entered a new phase on the night of 20–21 February, after Rommel's forces had gained possession of the pass's northwestern exits. Allied precautionary measures of the previous day were now to be tested in the broader area north and west of the pass. The Allied task was to contain these forces after they had first advanced far enough along the diverging roads to be too widely separated for mutual support. Rommel did not have sufficient forces for strong attacks along both. The Axis problem was to decide which road to block and which to use in an effort to extend the attack toward a major objective. After taking two days to get through Kasserine pass and after being forced to commit both *Kampfgruppe DAK* and *10th Panzer Division* in the process, Rommel was becoming hesitant, once more showing an attitude of discouragement which was most unusual for him. Should he continue under his directive to push toward Thala, or should he seek permission to employ reinforcements to feint in that direction but actually hit what might be weaker Allied resistance in a drive on the American base at Tébessa, as Kesselring claims to have suggested to him during his visit at Kasserine? Or should he wait to discover in which direction the prospects were brighter? His immediate course on the night of 20–21 February was to prepare for an Allied counterattack and to send out reconnaissance forces along each road.[3]

The Allies sought to establish containing forces on both roads, and to bar not only the gaps at Thala and Djebel el Hamra (1112), but even the secondary routes from the Bahiret Foussana valley onto the Bou Chebka plateau. Brigadier Nicholson, who had opened "Nickforce" headquarters at 0600, 21 February, in Thala sent more infantry to the defensive position begun by Brigadier Dunphie south of the village and prepared to employ reinforcements expected to arrive at Thala during the next two or three days. General Robinett's Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, struggled over a churned-up dirt road leading southward from Haïdra to the vicinity of Djebel el Hamra, and behind a light forward screen, reorganized along the eastern face of that ridge and in the passes at its center and northern end. Many stragglers from Kasserine pass and from even as far east as Djebel Ksaïra (560) were assembled at a line along the eastern base of the ridge, given rations and ammunition, and organized in provisional companies to defend the passes there. The 2d Battalion, U.S. 16th Infantry (Lt. Col. Joseph B. Crawford), was found waiting at the crossroads east of

[2] *21st Panzer Div, KTB,* 19–21 Feb 43. (2) Opns Order No. 6, 20 Feb 43, *ibid., Anlagenband 9.*

[3] (1) Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass,* pp. 355ff. (2) MS # T-3-P II (Kesselring), Pt. 2. (3) MS # C-066 (Kesselring).

Djebel el Hamra for commitment. Combat Command B during the early morning sent the battalion to block the routes from the Bahiret Foussana valley up onto the Bou Chebka plateau at a point where they ran through three secondary passes. It found camel trails running through two of these passes and a slippery, steep, dirt road in the most westerly (the Bou Chebka pass). A French Senegalese unit also moved into this area. Energetic preparations around the edges of Bahiret Foussana valley continued throughout the morning of 21 February as each side awaited offensive action by the other.[4]

The unit sent out by Rommel along the Tébessa road, *33d Reconnaissance Battalion,* reinforced by a small number of Italian tanks, some light howitzers, and some engineer troops, struck out to the northwest from Kasserine pass at 0200, 21 February. The force first encountered retiring American units. It then ran up against the Reconnaissance Company, 13th Armored Regiment, of Robinett's command which barred its progress until after daylight at a point about eight miles from Djebel el Hamra. The enemy then withdrew eastward out of range. A similar force of armored cars and self-propelled guns pushed Allied rear guards northward during the night along the road to Thala until it discovered, after a preliminary engagement in the morning fog with the 17/21 Lancers, supported by field artillery, that a substantial Allied force was in its path. The attackers knocked out six light Crusader tanks before this preliminary action on the Thala road was terminated.

At 1125, *33d Reconnaissance Battalion* reported that only small American forces had thus far appeared east of Djebel el Hamra. Without waiting for similar reports from air reconnaissance, Rommel therefore decided to resume the offensive. In the absence of an immediate threat from the west, he could at once attack the Allied forces south of Thala with the *7th Panzer Regiment* of the *10th Panzer Division,* which had been organizing within sight of Allied observers and under harassing artillery fire. At the same time, *Kampfgruppe DAK* under General Buelowius could seize the passes at Djebel el Hamra to secure his western flank. Beginning about noon, 21 February, operations began to follow the pattern determined by these decisions. Since General Robinett's communications with Brigadier Dunphie had been disrupted by the air bombing of the liaison officer's communications vehicle, the battles of 21–22 February along the two roads although simultaneous were somewhat independent of each other. Brigadier Nicholson was not in touch with Robinett and II Corps was in only intermittent contact.

The bulk of General Robinett's command entered the valley during the morning, and although not completely deployed, was suf-

[4] (1) CCB 1st Armd Div AAR, 1 Mar 43. (2) Memo, 2d Bn 16th Inf in Kasserine pass action, attached to Ltr, Col Crawford to author, 27 Jun 51. (3) 1st Inf Div G–3 Opns Rpt, 15 Jan–8 Apr 43. (4) II Corps AAR, 3 May 43. (5) Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, consisted of the following: Reconnaissance Company and the 2d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, with Companies G and I attached; the 2d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry; the 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion; the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion (less one company); the 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion (SP); detachments, the 105th Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion; Company D, 16th Armored Engineer Battalion; Maintenance and Supply Companies, 13th Armored Regiment; detachments, 16th and 49th Medical Battalions; the 68th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, by temporary attachment; the 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion; the 7th and 33d Field Artillery Battalions; elements, 3d Battalion, 39th Infantry; and the 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry. Rpt by Lt Col John T. Honeycutt, 21 Feb 43, Entry 164, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

ficiently well established by the time Buelowius' force approached to oppose it firmly, and in Rommel's opinion, "very skillfully." [5] The enemy sought the pass at the northern end of Djebel el Hamra, where a road to Haïdra connects with a branch leading to Tébessa. Protecting this area were the medium tanks of the 2d Battalion plus Company I, U.S. 13th Armored Regiment, supported by the 27th and 68th Armored Field Artillery Battalions, the 601st and 894th Tank Destroyer Battalions, and the 2d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry. Also present in the area were units of the 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion (SP) and the less mobile 105th Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion. Buelowius' instruction in the early afternoon to *33d Reconnaissance Battalion* to seize the gap by a sudden raid came too late to be executed. The unit waited between the road and the Hatab river near a slight ridge (Point 732) for the main body of *Kampfgruppe DAK* to come forward.

General Buelowius' main force left Kasserine pass at 1400. One battalion of infantry came up to the left flank of the reconnaissance unit about 1530, and the tank battalion of *Division Centauro* followed shortly afterward. At 1630 they started northwestward along the road but almost at once came under increasingly strong artillery fire from unlocated American guns on the south flank. A Stuka squadron divebombed the 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion with some effect, but itself received fire from the 443d Coast Artillery's multiple antiaircraft guns which destroyed at least two planes. The 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion maneuvered to the enemy's south flank and strengthened the fire from that quarter. The 2d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, in hull defilade refused to be lured from the cover of American artillery to the potent antitank screen which the enemy habitually organized, and simply held its ground except to head off what looked like an effort to envelop its own northern flank. One tank of Company I, but not its crew, was lost in parrying this attempt. The enemy pulled back to the southeast about 1800, at least temporarily frustrated. At the same time, *580th Reconnaissance Battalion* crossed the rough, sharply eroded foothill area north of Djebel Nogueza (1127) along a camel track leading up to the Bou Chebka plateau. It was under orders to swing southeastward at Aïn Bou Driès in order to take from the rear the Allied troops guarding the passes northwest of Thélepte and Fériana.

The attack by *Kampfgruppe DAK* had stopped about four miles short of its objective. Level plain intervened, a flat almost devoid of cover and under ready observation from the scrub-covered hills on three sides. Frontal attack in daylight seemed out of the question and, even at night, would be met by the Allied troops in strength and on terrain well adapted to defense. A direct thrust westward to the base of Djebel el Hamra, followed by a northward march along its eastern ridge would be open to prolonged attack on the flank, and was therefore deemed too risky. The remaining possibility was a night attack on the defile in the middle of Djebel el Hamra, three miles south of the unattainable gap at the mountain's northern tip. Rommel authorized a wide envelopment to the south during the approaching night.[6]

[5] Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass*, p. 360.

[6] (1) *DAK, KTB*, 21 Feb 43. (2) Msg, *German-Italian Panzer Army* to *DAK*, 21 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1151/3.* (3) Msg, *Ditto* to *580th Rcn Bn*, 21 Feb 43, *ibid., Anlage 1151/4.*

The number of Allied forces along the southern edge of the Bahiret Foussana valley increased on 21 February but suffered from faulty co-ordination arising from defective communications and confused channels of command. The companies of the 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, attached to Combat Command B, were interspersed with some Senegalese troops near Bou Chebka pass. Company G, 16th Infantry, moved north at midnight to protect the new positions of the 33d Field Artillery Battalion on a low ridge north of that pass. Company E, 16th Infantry, stationed in the upper valley of the Cherchara river, would be in the path of the *580th Reconnaissance Battalion* if it continued to Aïn Bou Driès. General Robinett also sent the 2d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, southward toward Bou Chebka pass, where it would be in readiness to move eastward on the right flank of the 2d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, when the time arrived for a counterattack toward Kasserine pass. During the night, General Allen sent the 3d Battalion, 16th Infantry, from the Bou Chebka area northward beyond Aïn Bou Driès, to a point from which it could reinforce the 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, as needed. The 1st Combat Engineer Battalion he sent northeastward to work along the slopes of Djebel Chambi (1544) toward Kasserine pass. The 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, made an elaborate, circuitous march by truck to the western side of Djebel el Hamra which it approached cautiously in attack formation next morning, only to find that Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, had held it securely for more than a day. This event was probably one illustration of the inadequacy of information at Headquarters, II Corps, and the confusion of responsibility which had come about, and which might have been seriously damaging had the enemy been able to take advantage of it.[7]

The enemy's attack against Combat Command B on 22 February opened at the southwestern corner of the Bahiret Foussana valley against positions held by the 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, and 2d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, with the 33d Field Artillery Battalion. The enemy, in a column of infantry supported by artillery and tanks, was apparently as surprised as the Allied units to find himself engaged at daylight not near Djebel el Hamra but nearly seven miles to the southeast near the Bou Chebka pass. His night march had been both delayed and misdirected, while he advanced through difficult terrain and recurrent downpours. The two battalions of *Panzer Grenadier Regiment Africa* cut off Battery C, 33d Field Artillery Battalion, and captured intact five 105-mm. howitzers, three 40-mm. antiaircraft guns, and thirty vehicles. The rest of the American line was able to pull back, leaving the enemy in possession of Hill 812,[8] but pinned down by American artillery fire through which he dared not withdraw over the open plain. The enemy's artillery and tanks had been far enough in the rear of his attack to pull back, but his infantry could not return to the main axis of attack, that toward the south pass of Djebel el Hamra.

The *5th Bersaglieri Battalion* was opposite General Robinett's line, which he had established about half a mile east of a secondary road connecting the two Djebel el

[7] (1) 1st Div G–3 Opns Rpt, 15 Jan–8 Apr 43, Annex 6. (2) Memo with Ltr, Col Crawford to author, 27 Jun 51. (3) Robinett, Among the First, MS, pp. 412–13. (4) Battle Rpt, 3d Bn 16th Inf to CO 16th Inf, 8 Mar 43, in 1st Div AAR. (5) CCB 1st Armd Div S–3 Jnl, 22 Feb 43.

[8] This point is not to be confused with Djebel Zebbeus, which is the same height.

Hamra passes. The line utilized the cover afforded by wadies and low ridges and benefited from superb observation points on the high hills in directing the fire of artillery batteries. The *2d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment* (reinforced), of Robinett's force, was in hull defilade astride the enemy's path of advance. At about 0930 Buelowius was misled by a reconnaissance report into believing that his right flank, toward Djebel el Adjered (1385), was threatened. Prevented from regrouping his infantry by American artillery fire on his position at Hill 812 he instead reoriented his artillery toward the north. Earlier in the morning he had ordered the *1st Battalion, 8th Panzer Regiment* with the assault guns of *Division Centauro,* to launch an attack against the American positions opposite the *5th Bersaglieri Battalion* with the objective of pushing General Robinett's armor and infantry back into the Djebel el Hamra defiles. The drive seemed necessary because the Italians were showing signs of an impending breakdown in morale. Between 1030 and noon this movement relieved the pressure in their sector, but soon ran into powerful antitank defenses and devastating artillery fire of marked effectiveness. It was now apparent that the effort to reach the passes of Djebel el Hamra could not succeed. The enemy was never to get any nearer to Tébessa. He was already planning to pull back into Kasserine pass after dark when the situation on the southern edge of the valley boiled over.[9]

Even before 0800, the 3d Battalion, 16th Infantry, had been ready to begin a counterattack on the left of the 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, to restore the situation of the early morning and to prevent any penetration by the enemy between the 1st Infantry Division's units at Bou Chebka pass and those of Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, to the north. General Terry Allen kept trying all morning to get the counterattack started but without success. Finally by utilizing communications to General Robinett through the command post of Colonel Ringsak's 2d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, preparations for the counterattack were co-ordinated; it began at 1600. The 3d Battalion, 16th Infantry, advanced against Hill 812. It was supported by fire from the 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, on the right and from the 2d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, on the left. Aided by a sortie of Company G, 13th Armored Regiment, the battalion drove the enemy off the hill. He abandoned eight American guns and the vehicles which he had captured earlier that morning, all in serviceable condition, and after suffering heavy casualties withdrew in some disorder toward Kasserine pass. Some of his troops retired into the zone of other elements of the 13th Armored Regiment, where they were captured. Near Hill 732, in another action, the *5th Bersaglieri Battalion* was overtaken at the end of the day by a few of Robinett's tanks. They forced the enemy to scatter in headlong retreat, and captured many vehicles and supplies intact.[10]

Thala Narrowly Escapes Capture

The defense of Thala on 21 February pitted the British 26th Armoured Brigade, under "Nickforce," against thirty tanks, twenty self-propelled guns, and thirty-five half-track carriers of the *10th Panzer Division* (−). American participants played no significant part. Brigadier Dunphie, com-

[9] *DAK, KTB,* 22 Feb 43.

[10] *DAK KTB,* 22 Feb 43.

manding the brigade, had understood at his midnight conference with McNabb and Robinett at Thala that he was to defend Thala at all costs, gaining a day for the 2/5 Leicesters and others to prepare a main defensive line on the ridge south of the village. He did not share General Robinett's understanding that all tanks were to be conserved. Indeed, his tanks were so light and equipped with guns of such short range as to be at severe disadvantage against German Mark III's and Mark IV's. They were about to be replaced by American Shermans and could be expended. And to gain the necessary time against a determined and aggressive foe without heavy losses was out of the question.

On the road from Kasserine to Thala several ridges extend like widespread fingers eastward from Djebel Bireno (1419) across the road. During 20 February Dunphie, commanding the 26th Armored Brigade, had taken an armored force (17/21 Lancers and 2d Lothians) to the south of these ridges. On the morning of the 20th, Brigadier Nicholson had ordered the 10th Battalion, Royal Buffs, to move up to this blocking position. The enemy tanks of von Broich's *7th Panzer Regiment* formed up in view but out of effective artillery range. At about 0930 on 21 February they began to advance. But they were extremely deliberate as they searched for mines along the route of advance. German air reconnaissance revealed the weakness of the opposition on the eastern side of the road, the observers correctly estimating British artillery at only two batteries. The enemy avoided these weapons by a flanking maneuver east of the road. Dunphie's tanks fell back as slowly as possible and, being outranged and lightly armored, used the shelter of each ridge to fire from cover at close range. The enemy promptly met such tactics by moving to positions from which to enfilade the ridges.

On a ridge about nine miles south of Thala the British, at the cost of fifteen tanks, held up *Kampfgruppe, 10th Panzer Division,* until 1600. Rommel, well aware that he was in a desperate race against time and disturbed by von Broich's slow advance, had spent most of the early afternoon with von Broich's spearhead. Taking command of the situation himself, he ordered the infantry to entruck and follow the tanks until they came up to the British line of defense. On this line a tank battle raged for over an hour. Then Dunphie ordered his force to fall back to the last ridge south of Thala where the 2/5 Leicesters were in position on the final line of defense. The British eked out their diminished power of resistance by a skillful use of smoke in a delaying action which permitted all British forces to slip through a gap in the defensive line in front of Thala at about 1900, when Dunphie's command vehicle followed the others through to supposed security. Enemy tanks followed directly after Dunphie's through the very center of the infantry positions guarding the ridge, erupting with gunfire only after they had penetrated well within the British lines.[11]

Soon the northern slope of the ridge was a scene of wild confusion. Burning vehicles, flares, pointblank fire from tanks, both German and British, and from the British artillery, provided a tumultous melée. The enemy adroitly knocked out signal vehicles at the start, thus preventing prompt reports to Thala. Machine gunners following the tanks took positions along the heights and soon completed the job of wrecking the whole line of defense on which so much effort had been expended. At severe disadvan-

[11] (1) Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass,* p. 359. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

tage, the British drew on every resource to hold the enemy, to destroy his tanks, and to throw him back. After three hours, the enemy's offensive was stopped. He had withdrawn, taking with him about 700 prisoners, but nothing remained with which to check him if he should return at daylight.

During the afternoon, the U.S. 9th Infantry Division's artillery was approaching from Tébessa, and, in preparation for an arrival during the night, positions for the guns had been selected and surveyed under the direction of Brig. H. J. Parham, British First Army artillery officer. A tidal flow of supply vehicles away from Thala during the critical battle at the end of the day came under control as the American column approached. The arrival of Brig. Gen. S. LeRoy Irwin's command could not have been more opportune. Summoned when Sbeïtla was being evacuated, it had come from the vicinity of Tlemcen in western Algeria in four days, an uninterrupted march of over 800 miles. The twelve 155-mm. howitzers of the 34th Field Artillery Battalion were emplaced during the early hours of 22 February along the road running west from Thala, with the six 75-mm. howitzers of the 47th's Cannon Company protecting their westernmost flank. The twenty-four 105-mm. howitzers of the 60th and 84th Field Artillery Battalions went into position about 3,000 yards farther south, with six 75-mm. howitzers of the 60th's Cannon Company on their right. About 2,000 yards still farther south was the new main line of defense, and 1,200 yards south of it, on the dominating ridge, formerly the main defense line, were the Germans.[12]

General Irwin's arrival with the American artillery at Thala was highly encouraging, but the defending force was very low on infantry, especially after losing so many from 2/5 Leicesters at the ridge line, and it was deficient in armored fighting vehicles. Those tanks which the 17/21 Lancers and 2d Lothians had been using arrived, after almost twenty-four hours of continuous operation, in an undependable mechanical condition, thus adding to other vulnerable characteristics. British forces at Sbiba sent one battalion of infantry (2d Hampshires), the 16/5 Lancers, partly equipped with new Shermans, and an artillery regiment, the 152d, Royal Artillery (—), but these did not reach Thala until well along in the afternoon. Help from Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, was sought. Brigadier Nicholson reported to II Corps that he had about seventy enemy tanks waiting on his front to attack, and First Army supported his request to II Corps for help from Robinett by stating rather incorrectly that Nicholson was bearing the whole weight of enemy armor.[13]

[12] (1) Interv with Maj Gen S. LeRoy Irwin, 25 Jan 50. (2) 60th Inf Hist, 1943, pp. 1–5. (3) Div Arty Rpt, Thala Engagement, in 9th Div AAR. (4) This reinforcement was the most dramatic of several. Thirty-five M4 tanks and crews by rail and seventeen more M4 tanks by sea and rail were sent from Morocco to Tébessa; twenty-five British Churchill tanks were sent to Sbiba; 800 replacement troops per day and the bulk of the 9th Infantry Division were also sent eastward in accordance with plans scheduled before the attack, and later expedited to meet probable needs; other reinforcements were scraped from existing units in the west and sent up to make good the earlier losses which the Axis forces had inflicted. Before the Axis troops were thrown back, two tank destroyer battalions, one tank battalion (separate) with fifty-six more medium tanks, elements of the 17th Field Artillery Regiment and the 13th Field Artillery Brigade, plus a considerable increase in antiaircraft units, were en route to Tunisia. AFHQ G–3 Rpts 100–107.

[13] The II Corps ordered Robinett "to bring all possible forces to bear in order to assist" Nicholson's command, but he was doing so already as a matter of course. 13th Armd Regt Opns Jnl, 0845, 22 Feb 43.

Nicholson, to offset the severe disadvantage inflicted on him by the loss of the ridge position in front of his artillery, sent some of his remaining tanks on a counterattack just before dawn. The attempt miscarried with the loss of five or more tanks, and the survivors brought back the alarming and incorrect report of enemy strength already mentioned. But the foray actually had a beneficial effect. The aggressive character of the action seemed to von Broich to confirm erroneous intelligence, gained from early reconnaissance and from Arabs, that the Allies in Thala were preparing a substantial counterattack using reinforcements which had been coming in during the night. After himself reconnoitering, Rommel approved von Broich's decision to postpone any offensive drive on Thala until the expected Allied thrust had been contained at positions favorable for such action, but to lunge forward immediately after stopping the Allied attack. He could then expect to continue through Thala to the north.[14]

The morning passed without an Allied counterattack—only heavy air strikes, artillery exchanges, and what the enemy took to be small probing ground attacks along the front.[15] The lines remained unchanged. Neither side co-ordinated low-level air attacks with efforts at ground advance. Axis air support was primarily devoted to opposing the arrival of Allied reinforcements at Thala by strikes on columns north and northwest of it.[16] Although General von Broich assumed that more Allied reinforcements were to be expected, he might have tried to break through Thala that afternoon, had he not before starting such an attack received orders from Field Marshal Rommel to pass to the defensive. Thus the best opportunity to penetrate the secondary mountain barrier beyond Kasserine pass toward Le Kef was allowed to slip away without being pushed to the limit. By 23 February reinforcements at Thala rendered the Allied position much less vulnerable. The enemy reckoned Allied losses at the end of the action at 571 prisoners, 38 tanks, 12 antitank guns, 1 antiaircraft gun, 16 heavy mortars, 3 self-propelled guns, 9 motor vehicles, and 3 aircraft.[17]

The XII Air Support Command participated in the battle south of Thala and east of Djebel el Hamra under most adverse conditions, but with observable effect. Enemy operations had confined Allied planes to the one airfield at Youks-les-Bains, where bad weather limited take-offs to the steel planked airstrip. Low clouds and repeated showers hampered flights, but 114 sorties over the Thala area were completed on 22 February. Fighter-bombers roaring over the enemy at about 1630 caught infantry, guns, and tanks and seemed to produce a perceptible reduction in the volume of enemy fire.

Air co-operation with Combat Command B proved far less satisfactory. American antiaircraft fire on 21 February turned back two friendly missions and damaged five American planes beyond repair. Next day, in spite of the most specific admonition to

[14] (1) Msgs, 22 Feb 43, Entries 145, 147, and 152, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (3) *10th Panzer Div, Ic, Taetigkeitsbericht,* 22 Feb 43.

[15] The 9th Division Artillery sustained forty-five casualties, fired 1,904 rounds on this and the following day, and had only fifteen minutes of 105-mm. fire left at the end of the battle.

[16] Compilation of sorties from *KTB, Fliko, Ic,* in *10th Panzer Div, Ic, TB Anlagen, 29.XI.42–15. III.43.*

[17] *10th Panzer Div, Ic, Taetigkeitsbericht,* 22 Feb 43.



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expect friendly planes to fly straight over American troops at low altitudes, when they would rock their wings, rather than dive or glide in a *chandelle* as the enemy normally did when striking, and after attention had been called to the dark-painted noses of American aircraft in contrast to the white or yellow of the enemy, antiaircraft fire nonetheless shot up five American P–38's. It could not be attributed to faulty identification, for their distinctive, double fuselage had no counterpart in the enemy's air force. In order to remedy this lack of coordination, General Robinett issued a most definite order that troops were not to fire on any aircraft whatever until after it attacked.[18]

On 22 February, at 1415, the command of all Allied troops within II Corps' area was clarified with the establishment of a boundary along the southern edge of the Bahiret Foussana valley. All troops north of it came under the control of General Ward as Commanding General, U.S. 1st Armored Division; all troops south of it, except units attached to Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, were subordinated to General Allen as Commanding General, U.S. 1st Infantry Division. Ward's mission was "to hold general line of Djebel Hamra–Thala and to cover left flank of II Corps, preventing Germans moving to west. Liaison to the British 6th Armoured Division (Gen. Kiethly [sic] now at Sbiba." He was to undertake such offensive operations as were practicable to recover Kasserine valley, maintaining close liaison with General Allen. This arrangement straightened out the uncertainties in the southwestern corner of the valley before the end of the day, but it gave General Ward a mission also involving control of Brigadier Nicholson's command. While General Ward and his operations officer, Lt. Col. Hamilton H. Howze, came forward to check the situation and to prepare a standard field order for further defensive operations, British First Army altered the relationship of "Nickforce" to II Corps, General Anderson placing Headquarters, 6th Armoured Division (General Keightley), at Rohia in command of "Nickforce," directly under II Corps, effective at 2000 22 February.[19]

[18] (1) CCB 1st Armd Div S–3 Jnl, 0230, 22 Feb 43, and 0917, 23 Feb 43. (2) Msg, CO XII ASC to All Air Support Parties, 1935, 21 Feb 43, Entry 20, in 1st Inf Div G–3 Jnl.

[19] (1) Msg, II Corps to Allen and Ward, 1415, 22 Feb 43, Entry 185, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (3) 1st Armd Div FO 7, 23 Feb 43. (4) Gen Ward, Personal

The Enemy Retires Through Kasserine Pass

Group Rommel on 22 February had enough fuel to cover from 250–300 kilometers, a somewhat low stock of German ammunition augmented by considerable captured stocks of all calibers, and rations for four days. Reserves already accumulated at Sousse, Sfax, and Gabès for the entire southern army consisted of fuel for 150–200 kilometers, more than a day's supply of ammunition, and rations for more than six days.[20]

Axis reconnaissance along the north Tunisian front on 22 February indicated that the advanced positions of British 5 Corps and French XIX Corps had not been seriously weakened or deprived of local reserves.[21] Air reconnaissance west of the Allied southern flank revealed the fact that reinforcements were approaching Thala from Le Kef and moving from Tébessa toward the Bahiret Foussana plain. With a fairly correct picture of the Allied dispositions, Rommel recognized that his offensive could not succeed. Mud and mountain terrain ill suited to tank action, rain and fog impeding air support, and the lowered combat strength of the Axis units had all contributed to final failure. To be sure, any Allied intention of cutting through to the sea near Sfax and breaking communications between Rommel's and von Arnim's armies had been frustrated for several weeks. But Axis hopes for a successful penetration to Le Kef and beyond were completely extinguished.[22]



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Field Marshal Kesselring, accompanied by General Seidemann and others, visited Rommel's command post northwest of Kasserine again on the afternoon of 22 February. Both commanders agreed that *Comando Supremo* should be advised that the time had come to withdraw the attacking forces from west central Tunisia. They proposed now a speedy shift to the Mareth area, in order to hit the British Eighth Army assembling there with a sudden attack before it could prepare for offensive operations and become a serious threat. While waiting for a new directive from *Comando Supremo,* Rommel ordered his troops to begin the retirement into Kasserine pass. General

Diary. In private possession. (5) Two memos by Gen Ward, 22 Feb 43, in 1st Armd Div Hist Rcds, Vol. II.

[20] Rpt on Supply Situation, 22 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, O Qu, Anlagen zum KTB, 16.II–31.III.43, Anlage 215.*

[21] Daily Rpt for 22 Feb 43, *Fifth Panzer Army* to *Panzer Army Africa,* 1005, 23 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1159.*

[22] *Panzer Army Africa, KTB 2,* 22 Feb 43.

Ambrosio issued his order for retirement shortly before midnight.[23]

To aid Rommel's withdrawal and regrouping, enemy units began exerting pressure at various points in the British First Army's line on 22 February. *Fifth Panzer Army* units attacked across the Ousseltia valley and into the mountain range west of it. A provisional German force (Colonel Lang), of which *47th Grenadier Regiment* was the major component, started for Maktar during 22 February skirting the mountains of Kesra. The force was about six miles from Maktar when a radioed order canceled its attack.[24]

Withdrawal by the Axis forces northwest of Kasserine pass into that gap was completed by forenoon of 23 February. While the *10th Panzer Division* took over defensive positions, *Kampfgruppe DAK* in the afternoon started for Fériana–Thélepte and there relieved *Division Centauro*. Allied and Axis aviation were both extremely active over the area, the former bombing and strafing the roads east of the pass and near Fériana, the latter discouraging Allied pursuit of the retreating troops by bombing and machine gunning the roads near Thala and Djebel el Hamra.[25] One hundred and four Allied planes were counted over the Kasserine area in one period of fifteen minutes. From four to eight Axis fighters engaged in sweeping flights almost steadily from 0840 to 1728.[26] Allied pressure lacked punch and the withdrawal continued in good order.[27]

Direction by II Corps of ground operations against the retreating enemy became extraordinarily hesitant at just the time that the enemy was most vulnerable. General Eisenhower thought late on 22 February that an Allied counterattack should start at once. Rommel's situation was not recognized, however, by First Army or by II Corps for more than a day after his decision to abandon the attack. In the case of British First Army, the forces defending Sbiba actually drew back near Rohia during the night of 22–23 February in order to be ready for an enemy attack from Thala northeastward toward Rohia and then south toward Sbiba. The *21st Panzer Division* might have entered Sbiba village unopposed but instead watched, as its orders required, until the Allies cautiously returned after an absence of about twenty-four hours.[28] At General Fredendall's headquarters, preparations were made to shift the II Corps front in case of an enemy break-through at Thala, and the total evacuation of Tébessa in consequence seemed a possibility.

Aside from the delay in correctly understanding Rommel's purpose, the main reason for the faltering direction of operations to hit the enemy as he pulled back, was the

[23] (1) Daily Rpt for 22 Feb 43, *German-Italian Panzer Army*, 0030, 23 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1163*. (2) Kesselring's recollection in 1949 was that Rommel was excessively depressed, inclined to exaggerate the British Eighth Army's threat to the *First Italian Army* whose rear guard was the *15th Panzer Division*, and unable to appreciate the advantages of the initiative which he still possessed. MS # C–066 (Kesselring). (3) Rad, *Comando Supremo*, Ambrosio to Rommel and others, 2310, 22 Feb 43, Transl in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1162*.

[24] (1) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB IV*, 21–22 Feb 43. (2) MS # D–173 (Lang).

[25] *Panzer Army Africa, KTB 2*, 23 Feb 43.

[26] Compilation of sorties, *KTB, Fliko, Ic*, in *10th Panzer Div, Ic, TB Anlagen, 29.XI.42–15.III.43*.

[27] Memo, Conf at *Headquarters, Group Rommel*, 23 Feb 43, in *21st Panzer Div, KTB Anlagen, Band 9, Anlage 64*.

[28] (1) *21st Panzer Div, KTB*, 23 Feb 43. (2) Brigade Légère Mécanique Jnl, 22–23 Feb 43. (3) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.



CREW OF HALF-TRACK *waiting for orders to fire at approaching enemy aircraft, 24 February 1943. This weapon mounted a 37-mm. gun and two .50-cal. machine guns.*

shuffling of the command. Fredendall had shifted the 1st Armored Division northeastward and placed its commander in charge of operations by all units, American, British, and French, west and northwest of Kasserine pass. But he had already proposed to General Eisenhower that General Ward should be replaced. The commander in chief, thinking in terms of the rehabilitation which the U.S. 1st Armored Division might require, was prepared to approve Ward's relief by Maj. Gen. Ernest N. Harmon, then Commanding General, 2d Armored Division, under General Patton in Morocco, until he received conscientious advice to the contrary. While Harmon was flying east, General Eisenhower concluded that any such change was, after all, inexpedient. Harmon accordingly went on from Algiers to the zone of battle in the capacity of "a useful senior assistant" to General Fredendall in the "unusual conditions of the present battle," for the corps commander to employ as he chose, but not with Eisenhower's encouragement to relieve Ward of his command.[29]

Just as General Ward was about to issue his first orders to his division, with the British 26th Armored Brigade attached, for operations in the Bahiret Foussana valley, he learned that Harmon was soon to arrive to assume command in the capacity of deputy corps commander. He issued the defense orders but withheld those for counterattack.[30] He ordered Robinett and Dunphie

[29] Msg 1922, CinC AF to CG 18 A Gp, 20 Feb 43. Smith Papers. (2) Msg, CinC AF to CG II Corps, 22 Feb 43, CinC AF Diary, 22 Feb 43. (3) Butcher, *My Three Years With Eisenhower*, p. 271, citing remarks by Harmon. (4) Interv with Maj Gen Ernest N. Harmon (Ret.), 15 Sep 52.

[30] 1st Armd Div FO 7, 23 Feb 43.



THE RAILROAD STATION AT KASSERINE VILLAGE.

to continue on unchanged missions, their common boundary being the Kasserine–Haïdra railroad; their outer boundaries were also clearly defined. Combat Command A, 1st Armored Division, under General McQuillin, was to be held east of Haïdra in Division Reserve, available for counterattack either through Thala or Djebel el Hamra on Ward's orders. The 16th Armored Engineer Battalion (less detachments) was to continue working on the torn-up Haïdra–Djebel el Hamra road and to conduct route reconnaissance.

During the night of 22–23 February, General Harmon's long and hurried journey from Morocco brought him to Fredendall's advance command post at Djebel Kouif. He had made the last part of the trip, from Algiers via Constantine and Tébessa, by automobile. At each of these points he obtained military intelligence which was fragmentary and already out of date. At Fredendall's headquarters, the situation was still not well enough known to permit issuance of orders for an Allied counterattack. Fredendall gave Harmon written orders placing him in direct command of the U.S. 1st Armored Division and such elements of the British 6th Armored Division as were within the II Corps area. Harmon had no staff, only the aide who had accompanied him from Morocco and an assistant operations officer (Lt. Col. Barksdale Hamlett) from the II Corps Artillery Section. A radio-equipped vehicle with driver and radio operator was lent him by II Corps. He drove on during the night to see Ward at Haïdra and Nicholson at Thala, and next morning,



MARCHING THROUGH KASSERINE PASS, *26 February 1943.*

Robinett near Djebel el Hamra, as well as miscellaneous units which he encountered during these strenuous movements.

Although not relieving Ward of his status as Commanding General, 1st Armored Division, Harmon did assume Ward's mission and was given Ward's staff and command post. Harmon insisted that Hains's provisional unit of M4 medium tanks with diesel motors and British radios be sent to occupy a defensive position near Thala. He took responsibility for holding at Thala the 9th Division artillery which British First Army had ordered sent back to Le Kef.[31]

The next day, 23 February, passed without significant Allied pressure on Rommel's troops. Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, moved gingerly toward the pass. The weary troops of Brigadier Dunphie's command also marked time. It became gradually clear that the enemy was not coming out of the pass to attack again but was going to retire through the eastern exit. At 2000, 23 February, "Nickforce" was officially dissolved. General Harmon reconnoitered and prepared for the forthcoming counterattack to clear the enemy from Kasserine pass. After darkness, a heavy air attack on the enemy in the pass was delivered by Royal Air Force night bombers without advance co-ordination with the American ground troops, who missed the opportunity to press forward before the enemy could recover from its effects.[32] It was after mid-

[31] Interv with Gen Harmon, 15 Sep 52.

[32] Robinett, Among the First, pp. 423–44.

night when General Ward received the following orders from General Harmon:

> Your mission with 16th RCT, attached. You will drive enemy from the valley, destroying as much of him as possible, and recapture Kasserine Pass. Thereafter you will place 16th RCT in defense of the pass, at which time 16th reverts to [the] control [of] 1st Infantry Division.
>
> CG, II Corps
> 2301A/23 Feb 43 [33]

Harmon had also given Robinett similar oral orders. The time set for the Allied counterattack according to what Harmon called "Plan Howze" was 0630, 25 February.[34] The general scheme of maneuver was that which the terrain dictated to any intelligent commander. Two forces must converge from starting points which were perhaps fifteen miles apart and work along the heights to control Djebel Semmama and Djebel Chambi on either side of the gap, making their main effort on the outer flanks and co-ordinating the action on the inner flanks, especially as they drew closer to the pass. Harmon strengthened Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, for the attack by the attachment of the 16th Infantry. In effect, this attachment required bringing the regiment back from participation in General Allen's push eastward over rugged mountain terrain on the 1st Infantry Division's side of the divisional boundary, after it had gone much of the way to the eastern entrance of the pass, and holding the regiment for a later assault along the edge of the valley. On the other side of the Bahiret Foussana valley, the British 26th Armoured Brigade worked slowly to the gap between Djebel Bireno and Djebel Semmama, lifting quantities of mines, until late on 24 February. On that day the 1st Guards Brigade, reinforced, took over to make the attack southeastward over the heights and across the shoulder of Djebel Semmama as well as along the Thala–Kasserine road.

The Allies attacked against a phantom foe. Since they were so short of reserves, they prepared with appropriate care. But the actual operation turned out to be an unopposed march, impeded only by road demolitions, mines, and booby traps. The 210-mm. mortar shells which had fallen at random during the previous afternoon on the Bahiret Foussana plain were no longer observed by Combat Command B, and were described by the British force across the valley as infrequent. The troops which had barred occupation of Djebel Zebbeus by a provisional American infantry unit late on 24 February had gone by the next morning. The American artillery preparation drew no response. Both American and British forces moved into the pass as rapidly as routes could be opened. By 1000, General Ward was at the defile on the Tébessa–Kasserine road, where General Roosevelt and Colonel Gardiner soon appeared. On the far side, the 2d Battalion, Coldstream Guards, and a squadron of tanks of 16/5 Lancers, with artillery in support, could be seen along the road, with the 3d Battalion, Grenadier Guards, on the heights to the north. The pass was free of the enemy, and once the mine fields could be cleared, the Allies would be free to guard it against attack from the east and to prepare for the time when they would regain the initiative in central Tunisia.[35]

[33] 1st Armd Div Hist Rcds, Vol. II.

[34] CCB 1st Armd Div S–3 Jnl, 2315, 24 Feb 43.

[35] (1) II Corps AAR, 2 May 43. (2) CCB 1st Armd Div AAR, 20–25 Feb 43. (3) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (4) Memo by Gen Ward, in 1st Armd Div Hist Rcds, Vol. II. (5)

The New Army Groups

The Allied and Axis coalitions each emerged from the February battles with new army group commands in Tunisia. Gen. Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander took command of 18 Army Group late on 19 February. Field Marshal Rommel was designated commander of *Army Group Africa* on 23 February. Each commander was occupied at once with the aftermath of the recent battles and the prospect of future offensive operations under his control.[36]

Alexander had toured the Tunisian front during the latter part of the Axis offensive and thus saw the principal commanders and troops of British First Army when they were under strong enemy pressure. The effect of a struggle to overcome defects in organization left from the initial race for Tunis while at the same time meeting the enemy's unbalancing January jabs was manifest. He found the system of command and responsibility not clear-cut enough, and the provision for control inadequate for successful operations. He took command, moreover, at a time when the performance of American troops was in his opinion clouded by enough disappointing incidents to discredit their actual performance and even to throw doubts on their capacities. A disparaging attitude toward American troops was found by German interrogators of British and French prisoners of war. General Alexander's unfavorable estimate was destined to linger, encouraging him to depend more heavily upon British units than later circumstances warranted.

His first task was to hold certain vital areas, including the existing line in central Tunisia and the approaches to Tunis which were best adapted to the eventual "final attack." He directed General Anderson to do what he had in fact, under General Eisenhower's instructions, been trying to accomplish for more than a month, namely: to regroup his forces in distinct national sectors and to establish a general reserve, chiefly of armored units, with which to meet enemy threats. Meanwhile, Alexander proposed to revise the leadership in order to bring about firm direction and centralized control, and to restore morale. For the latter reason, he directed that the Americans should first receive battlefield experience, guaranteeing them small successes and later, the tests of larger undertakings. In the effort to improve leadership he had to consider both the relief of existing commanders by new ones and the possibilities of producing competent field grade officers more swiftly by special training. In both matters he had to avoid damaging Allied unity of effort by offending national susceptibilities.[37]

General Alexander's participation in the battles along the Western Dorsal was not extensive. He supported General Anderson's wish to concentrate British armor at Thala, even though by this step the front farther to the northeast might be subjected to grave risk. In any event the enemy had

Ward, Personal Diary, 22–25 Feb 43. In private possession. (6) Robinett, Among the First, pp. 430–32.

[36] (1) Field Marshal Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander, "The African Campaign from El Alamein to Tunis, from 10th August, 1942, to 13th May, 1943," printed in Supplement, February 3, 1948, to *The London Gazette,* February 5, 1948 (cited hereafter as Alexander, "The African Campaign"), p. 870. (2) Rad, *Comando Supremo,* Ambrosio to Rommel and von Arnim, 1530, 23 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1172;* see pp. 485, 509–19 below.

[37] (1) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (2) Intervs, Field Marshal Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander with Dr. Sidney T. Mathews, 10–15 Jan 49, Ottawa, Canada. In private possession.

already decided to abandon the offensive when this decision was made. He tried to expedite the advance of Montgomery's Eighth Army into southern Tunisia with a view to alleviating Rommel's pressure near Kasserine pass, but the enemy had started back toward Mareth before Montgomery was prepared to exert any such influence; Rommel's decision to retire was in no sense made necessary by the Eighth Army's movements. Alexander arranged with General Juin for French light forces to protect the extreme southern flank of the British First Army, southwest of Gafsa, and to transmit intelligence from the French to First Army.[38]

The Axis had long considered how to organize a central unified command in Tunisia.[39] The organizational preparations had been made and were ready when, on 23 February, *Comando Supremo* ordered the activation of *Army Group Africa.* Headquarters, *Army Group Africa,* was primarily formed from that of the former *German-Italian Panzer Army,* which had been inactivated on 20 February and replaced by the *First Italian Army.* One major departure from previous planning was the substitution of Rommel for von Arnim as the first army group commander. As late as the day before, Rommel had expressed to Kesselring an extreme reluctance to accept it. *Comando Supremo* endeavored to meet Rommel's reluctance by asking him to set the time when he would be ready, subject to oral agreement with Field Marshal Kesselring, to turn over the army group to von Arnim. Until Rommel left, von Arnim was to continue as commander of *Fifth Panzer Army.*[40]

In addition to altering the chain of command in Tunisia, the *Comando Supremo* directive of 23 February spelled out the conduct of future operations. While complimenting command and troops for the achievements in the Kasserine operation, *Comando Supreme* acknowledged the fact that Allied strength had so increased that the offensive would have to be broken off immediately. The mobile forces were to withdraw to the original line of departure while at the same time inflicting maximum casualties on the pursuing Allies, and using demolitions to obstruct their movements. *Army Group Africa's* next mission would be to destroy British Eighth Army's spearheads as they approached the Mareth position. For this mission it was to assemble the *10th Panzer Division* in the Sfax area, and the other mobile units, *21st Panzer Division* and *DAK,* near Gabès. Fifth Panzer Army was ordered to plan for an offensive operation on its north wing, while generally improving its positions and disrupting potential Allied offensive preparations by strong local attacks. *Comando Supremo* promised to ship to von Arnim the *Hermann Goering Division,* specifying that it be held in reserve behind the northern sector of his front. Behind his south sector, he was to assemble a mobile group drawn from available forces. The Axis naval forces were ordered to abandon the planned Tabarka landings. The Air Force's missions were reiterated: protection

[38] (1) MS # C–075 (Kesselring). (2) Maj Gen Sir Francis de Guingand, *Operation Victory* (London, 1947), p. 242. (3) Msg MCS/9, 18 A Gp to First Army, 21 Feb 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 141.

[39] (1) Rad, *OKW/WFSt/Op to German-Italian Panzer Army* and *Fifth Panzer Army,* 28 Jan 43 in *Panzer Africa, Ia, KTB, Anlagenband 8, Anlage 945.* (2) *OKW/WFSt, KTB,* 14 Feb 43.

[40] Rad, *Comando Supremo,* Ambrosio to Rommel and von Arnim, 1530, 23 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1172.* In his memoirs Rommel has stated that one reason for his unwillingness to be designated commander-in-chief was disbelief in the competence of his superiors at Rome. Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass,* p. 361.

of supply convoys and support of army ground operations.[41]

Balance Sheet of the February Battles

The Axis forces had pursued two objectives in the offensive against Sidi Bou Zid, Gafsa, Sbeïtla, Fériana, and through the Western Dorsal. They sought to reduce Allied capabilities of attack by the destruction of men and matériel, and to bring about a westward withdrawal of the British First Army in the north by deeply penetrating its southern flank. The Allied defense had frustrated the second of these intentions, and Allied forces eventually returned to the very ground from which they had been driven, with their capabilities for attack not significantly impaired. The enemy had inflicted substantial losses in men and matériel on the British, Americans, and French. The extent of these losses, in prisoners and in matériel destroyed or captured, is reflected in the incomplete claims made by *Group Ziegler* for the period 14–18 February and by *Group Rommel* for 19–22 February: [42]

Items	*Ziegler Claims*	*Rommel Claims*	*Total Claims*
Prisoners	2,876	845	3,721
Tanks	169	66	235
Self-propelled guns and reconnaissance vehicles	36	74	110
Antitank guns	19	48	67
Personnel carriers	95	0	95
Guns	3	10	13
Planes, by ground action	6	8	14

[41] (1) Rad, *Comando Supremo*, Ambrosio to Rommel and von Arnim, 1530, 23 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 9, Anlage 1172.* (2) *Panzer Army Africa, KTB 2*, 20 Feb 1943.

[42] (1) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB IV*, 19 Feb 43. (2) Rpt, *German-Italian Panzer Army* to *Comando Supremo, OB SOUTH* and others, 22 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlgenhanda 9, Anlage 1163.*

A later consolidated report of captured personnel and matériel only, for the period 16–24 February 1943 lists the following:[43]

Prisoners: 4,026
Individual weapons: Indefinite
Machine guns: 58
40-mm. guns: 25
87.6-mm. guns: 5 (British 25-pounders)
Undetermined caliber: 2
Heavy mortars: 13
Antiaircraft guns: 13
75-mm. self-propelled guns: 2
105-mm. self-propelled guns: 3
Motor vehicles: 161
Armored vehicles: 61
Tanks: 3
Ammunition: 45 tons
Gasoline: 100 cubic meters
Lubricants: 115 cubic meters
A large amount of engineer matériel

The German losses in the operations in southwestern Tunisia, 16–24 February, were reported as follows: [44]

Personnel		*Matériel*
Total	989	Individual weapons: 47
Killed	201	Light machine guns: 11
Wounded	536	20-mm. antiaircraft guns: 3
Missing	252	Self-propelled guns: 2
		Antitank guns: 5
		150-mm. rocket launchers: 4
		Motor vehicles: 61
		Armored vehicles: 6
		Tanks: 20

Records of the Allies suffer from the conditions of the battle but tend to bear out the losses of matériel, and to indicate also considerable personnel losses unknown to the enemy.[45]

[43] Rad, *German-Italian Panzer Army, OQu*, to *OB SOUTH, OQu*, 1 and 4 Mar 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, OQu KTB, Anlagenband zum KTB, 16.II.–31.III.43, Anlage 230.*

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] (1) At Kasserine pass, casualties of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, were reported as 6 killed, 35 wounded, and 119 missing in action; the 19th Engineers lost 11 killed, 28 wounded, and 89 missing in action; the 3d Battalion, 39th Infantry, fighting there and with Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, lost 11 killed, 30 wounded, and 136 missing in action. The 1st Armored Division's casualties, in all three categories, came to 1,401.

Most heavily hit on the Allied side was the U.S. 1st Armored Division, the 1st Armored Regiment of which suffered such losses to its 2d and 3d Battalions that they were temporarily combined in a provisional "23d" medium tank battalion, while one company each of the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion, 16th Armored Engineer Battalion, and 91st Armored Field Artillery Battalion, had to be wholly re-equipped. Losses by the 168th Infantry of the 34th Division through the encirclement of Djebel Lessouda (644), Djebel Ksaira (560), and Djebel Garet Hadid (620) also ran high. The 2d Battalion, 17th Field Artillery, had to be rebuilt. Yet these casualties were serious rather than devastating. The 1st Armored Division's withdrawal from Sbeïtla had been skillful. Stubborn resistance there and in the Bahiret Foussana valley by Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, was successful against elements of the *21st Panzer Division* and *Kampfgruppe DAK*, both of which had long fought under Rommel. The U.S. 1st Infantry Division, although it emerged from these operations still disappointed in its hope of fighting as a division instead of in separate components variously attached, retained an abundant capacity for effective action in the immediate future. The eastward movement by U.S. 9th Infantry Division units and by II Corps troops was not much delayed. British losses were chiefly in tanks for which replacements had been planned before the battle. In short, the Axis had achieved a tactical success rather than a major victory influencing the strategy of the campaign.

Why had the enemy not gained more? His initial success in forcing the Allies to withdraw to the Western Dorsal was cheaply won, for the Allied decision to withdraw was made as soon as he took Sidi Bou Zid with what the First Army insisted was only part of his available mobile striking forces. It was a belated decision which rested on the fact that the Allies were overextended along too great a line and their forces dispersed in combat groups of minor size, which would have to be committed piecemeal to meet the enemy's main effort. The Germans had thus been able to bring much stronger forces to bear on the hapless defenders of Sidi Bou Zid on 14 February and on the ill-fated counterattack by Combat Command C, 1st Armored Division, next day. The enemy's preponderance of force had in effect been increased by the disposition of Allied forces at Sidi Bou Zid, enabling him to isolate substantial elements on the hills, keep them out of the battle on the plain, and then to deal with them separately. The Germans on 14–15 February were not only more strongly equipped and more numerous but also wilier and more skillful than their American adversaries. Subsequent German attacks against a more experienced foe were adroitly parried and obstinately contested.

The enemy broke through Kasserine pass against a defense which seemed haphazard; but he failed in the attempt to exploit the break-through because these defenses actually turned out to be formidable in character. The organization of the pass for defense by adequate means was tardy, in part because of the belief that the enemy's main effort might be made from Gafsa or Fériana against Tébessa. Since the Allies had to comb the forces with which the pass was defended from other points along the front

(2) 26th Inf Hist, Kasserine Operation, in 26th Inf AAR, 11 Nov 42–14 Apr 43. (3) 19th Engr Regt Hist Rcds, Oct 42–Jan 44. (4) 39th Inf Hist, 1943. (5) 1st Armd Div G–3 Opns Jnl, 14–22 Feb 43.

and put them into action as they arrived, an atmosphere of improvisation was inescapable. But, to repeat, Rommel at least considered the defense stubborn and the performance of the U.S. troops superior.[46]

Obviously, Allied resistance cannot be given all the credit for stopping the Axis advance. To a large extent Rommel's failure may be attributed to an aggregate of Axis mistakes. The most consequential was the lack of unity of command and the indecision demonstrated after the successes gained in the battles near Sidi Bou Zid.[47] The second serious mistake made by the Axis command was the critical weakening of the attack forces just before *Angriffsgruppe Nord* was assigned its mission. This was compounded by repeated violation of the principle of mass. Twice Rommel divided his force, first by sending the *21st Panzer Division* against Sbiba and *DAK* into Kasserine pass, then sending *DAK* toward Tébessa and *10th Panzer Division* against Thala. Attacking at too many places at the same time, he was too weak to achieve a break-through in any one sector. In attacking the passes tactical errors were made by Rommel's subordinates who stubbornly attempted to force the defiles in a frontal attack instead of first gaining the shoulders. Finally, adverse weather conditions prevented the *Luftwaffe* from supporting the attack effectively. Thus Rommel's last big offensive stopped short of success. The whole operation from Sidi Bou Zid to the end resembled the actions of a fruit picker in the branches of a tree, reaching to the utmost before moving gingerly out farther along a limb and, in the end, leaving the best prize untouched for fear of falling.

American troops learned a number of lessons about enemy methods from these battles. German tank attacks, they found, were made in the dusk as well as at dawn, and under the light of star shells and flares were pressed until an American tank force was scattered. The enemy was apparently familiar with American practices, expecting two thirds of a force in the assault and one third in support, and meeting the situation repeatedly by a double envelopment. He continued to lure Americans into such traps and into the ambush of antitank guns. German antitank ammunition was incendiary while American armor-piercing shells merely knocked out tanks in a manner permitting repair after salvage from the battlefield. German tanks crept over the ground at a slow pace intended to avoid creating dust clouds and noises which would attract attention. Often they seemed immobile unless checked with reference to a prominent terrain feature at intervals. Once in battle, if taken under fire, a German tank was likely to stop and to appear to be knocked out. When once its adversary turned to a different opponent, the German would open up with rapid and accurate fire.

The Americans also noted deficiencies in their weapons. They found the M3 light

[46] In *Krieg ohne Hass,* p. 357, Rommel wrote of the defense in Kasserine pass: "Die Amerikaner hatten sich vorzueglich geschlagen."

[47] It is Kesselring's claim, but not a matter of the contemporary record, that Rommel was authorized to take command of *Group Ziegler* after it had completed its mission at Sidi Bou Zid and lead the combined mobile forces of both panzer armies in an offensive against Tébessa. General Deichmann asserts that Rommel did not use this authority because he distrusted *Comando Supremo.* The fact remains that Rommel did not press his point—perhaps because Kesselring was absent from his Rome headquarters—and acquiesced when von Arnim dissolved *Group Ziegler.* See MS # C-075 (Kesselring) and MS # D-309 (Deichmann).



GERMAN MEDIUM TANK MARK IV *knocked out by American artillery fire, Kasserine Pass area.*

tanks suited only for reconnaissance. The 75-mm. half-track gun carrier turned out to be extremely vulnerable. A soldier, when asked if enemy aircraft bullets went through the half-tracks replied, "No sir, they only come through the wall and then they rattle around." In Army slang they were known as "Purple Heart Boxes." The 37-mm. antitank gun with standard ammunition was effective only against scout cars and light vehicles except at very close ranges. Longer-range guns with better telescopic sights on tanks and for antitank roles were needed. Training and equipment for the avoidance, detection, and removal of mines, and for the use of mines against the enemy were inadequate.

Finally, air-ground co-ordination was still below expectations. The Axis dominance in the air was so great that training in aircraft identification seemed fruitless. Up front, experienced men were learning never to fire from the ground at an airplane, for fear of drawing attack, unless that airplane fired first. Air reconnaissance had given too little help to the forward elements. Air bombing missions were executed too slowly to influence most current battle situations.

Tactical air support was still "in short supply." [48]

The month of February had fulfilled Giraud's anxious anticipations; the month of March would test the ability of the Allied Force to benefit from earlier plans and from February's seasoning and experience.

[48] These observations are derived from several sources: (1) Msg 2771, Eisenhower to Marshall, 24 Feb 43, CinC AF Diary. (2) Interv, 1st Lt H. F. Hillenmeyer with Maj Gen Omar Bradley. OPD 381 Africa Sec 3, Case 96. (3) Obsr's Rpt, Lt Col Boyd Hubbard, Jr., via Brig Gen John E. Hull to Gen Arnold, 19 Apr 43. OPD 381 Africa Sec 3, Case 97. (4) Ltr, Eisenhower to Handy, 20 Mar 43. OPD Exec 3, Item 1a.

PART SIX

SHIFT TO NORTHERN TUNISIA

CHAPTER XXV

The Allies Prepare for Decisive Action

Both the Allies and the Axis began regrouping and preparing for the next stage of the Tunisian campaign as soon as Rommel had abandoned the February offensive. The Allies intended to press all Axis forces inside a firmly held cordon in the narrow northeastern corner of Tunisia, isolate them from Europe, and then split them into segments for piecemeal destruction. Operations to constrict the enemy within the limited bridgehead would consist of two major phases. First, the British Eighth Army (Gen. Sir Bernard Montgomery) would push northward along the coast through the Gabès narrows and central Tunisia beyond Sousse. Second, Allied engineers would construct new airfields and reconstruct captured enemy airfields close to the new front so that increasing Allied air power could be used against the enemy with full effect in the final stage of the campaign.

The British Eighth Army's drive northward would be the main Allied effort in its first phase. The British First Army when it had regrouped was expected to engage only in small holding attacks along the northern front and, of course, to hold onto its avenues of approach to Tunis and Bizerte. The U.S. II Corps in central Tunisia would during this phase also play only an auxiliary role. While the Eighth Army attacked the Mareth and Chott Positions near Gabès, the II Corps was expected, by carefully timed, well prepared, and suitably controlled attacks, to seize dominating positions along the enemy's line of communications. These restricted operations would not only absorb enemy reserves which could otherwise be used against the British Eighth Army but would also, in the army group commander's judgment, advance the training of II Corps, increase its self-confidence, and improve its morale. He had no intention of employing II Corps to cut the enemy's line of communications by thrusting beyond the Eastern Dorsal onto the coastal plain, but only to threaten such action and thus attract enemy reserves to engage in defensive measures. The Eighth Army's attack on the Mareth Position would begin in the middle of March. The auxiliary operations in central Tunisia were adjusted to that schedule.[1]

Reorganizing the Allied Command

When General Alexander arrived in Algiers on 15 February to confer with the Commander in Chief, Allied Force, arrangements for his headquarters at Constantine were completed, his responsibilities defined, and his directive prepared.[2] Headquarters, 18 Army Group, assumed principally those responsibilities previously discharged at AFHQ relating to the control of operations.

[1] Alexander, "The African Campaign."

[2] (1) Note of War Room Mtg, 22 Jan 43. AFHQ G–3 Ops 58/2.1, Micro Job 10C, Reel 188D. (2) AFHQ Opn Memo 30 (rev.), 18 Feb 43. (3) Dir, 17 Feb 43, printed in Alexander, "The African Campaign." App. B, pp. 885–86.

By close liaison, special staff visits, and a system of observation (called PHANTOM) and reporting over direct radio channels from the subordinate units in the field to army group headquarters, it undertook to achieve the necessary co-ordination between ground, air, and sea activities in the Tunisian area. Tactical air support was to be centrally controlled through air commanders with each British army and with II Corps, all under the higher command of the Headquarters, Northwest African Tactical Air Force. A naval liaison officer at 18 Army Group headquarters would furnish advice on naval problems to the ground commanders.

In Algiers, G–3, AFHQ, kept in close communication with General Alexander's command, and sent liaison officers on frequent visits. Army group controlled and coordinated the collection of intelligence by both the First and Eighth Armies, and by means of its own supplementary efforts was able to make full and accurate estimates of the Axis order of battle. General summaries and reports of interrogations of prisoners of war went directly to G–2, AFHQ, from forward collection agencies, with army group disseminating the resulting analyses. British troop training fell under its control but that of American troops was reserved for G–3, AFHQ. Logistical support, including transportation, remained outside the army group's province. Only the control over level of supply and assignment of priorities in delivery was exercised by army group.

Although it was an Allied headquarters with a certain number of American officers, 18 Army Group was predominantly British. At first most of its officers consisted of staff members of General Alexander's earlier command brought by airplane from Cairo. It was organized on British staff lines, with a list of about 70 at the outset, and over 100 before the end of March. The preparations for 18 Army Group's activation involved the removal of Headquarters, British First Army, from Constantine, to Laverdure, about 110 miles farther east, and closing of the AFHQ advanced command post at Constantine. The 18 Army Group occupied offices and billets thus vacated, and was ready for activation about 12 February, waiting only for the commanding general's arrival.[3] His chief of staff was Maj. Gen. Sir Richard L. McCreery. Brig. L. C. Holmes was in charge of operations, and an American, Brig. Gen. William C. Crane, was his deputy.

On 8 March the 18 Army Group began by active direction in the forward areas to supplement the planning and co-ordination which it had hitherto undertaken.[4] Although the regrouping which followed Rommel's retreat to the Eastern Dorsal had not yet been completed, the pattern was already apparent. The three headquarters directly subordinate to General Alexander were British First Army, U.S. II Corps, and British Eighth Army. The chain of command was to be in the form shown on the accompanying chart. The French XIX Corps' front was narrowed while most French troops were being rearmed and

[3] (1) 18 A Gp Staff Appointments List, 27 Feb 43 and Mar 43. AFHQ Micro Job 10A, Reel 6C. (2) History of Allied Force Headquarters and Headquarters NATOUSA, December 1942–December 1943, Pt. II, pp. 110–16, 324–26. DRB AGO. (3) Memo, G–3 AFHQ for CofS AFHQ, 30 Jan 43, sub: A Gp Hq. AFHQ Micro Job 10A, Reel 6C. (4) Alexander, "The African Campaign." (5) Intervs, Alexander with Mathews, 10–15 Jan 49. In private possession.

[4] First Army Opn Instruc 20, 7 Mar 43. DRB AGO.

trained, and General Koeltz remained under General Anderson's command.

General Alexander's survey of the Tunisian front and of his principal subordinates resulted in a decision to retain General Anderson, whom he then regarded as a sound soldier. His estimate of the performance by the U.S. II Corps commander during the recent battle was unfavorable, and he welcomed the possibility of a change for the better at that headquarters. The command of II Corps in future weeks had to be exercised by someone in whom Alexander had confidence and who, in turn, could claim the confidence of the American division commanders. Both General Ryder, whose 168th Infantry had been so badly affected by Fredendall's orders for its employment at Sidi Bou Zid, and General Ward, whose relief General Fredendall had proposed during the battle, lacked confidence in Fredendall's leadership, which they deemed responsible for assigning tasks and then prescribing both means and methods ill-adapted to their accomplishment; Fredendall, moreover, had precipitated a choice between himself and Ward, if either was to be retained. After an attempt at Headquarters, II Corps, at Djebel Kouif on 3 March to diagnose the state of the U.S. 1st Armored Division had revealed how much life and substance remained, and after General Alexander's estimate of General Fredendall had been taken into account, General Eisenhower determined to bring in a new corps commander, a conclusion in which he was confirmed by the information that his chief of staff, General Smith, his special representative, Maj. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, his former deputy chief of staff at the Advance Command Post, AFHQ, General Truscott, and his G–3, General Rooks, were able to furnish.

Maj. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., whom General Eisenhower selected, was brought to Tunisia from I Armored Corps in Morocco to participate in operations for which he had been thirsting. He took command of II Corps on 6 March, bringing with him a new chief of staff, Brig. Gen. Hugh J. Gaffey, and other staff officers in case of need. His service in Tunisia was to be an interruption in his planning and preparation to command the American troops in the forthcoming invasion of Sicily. Most of his I Armored Corps staff officers were not required in Tunisia. General Bradley was designated to succeed him as soon as operations in southern Tunisia were completed, and was made deputy corps commander until Patton's retirement from Tunisia. This change was the major modification of the chain of command in the Allied Force.[5]

General Eisenhower's instructions to Patton defined his immediate task as the rehabilitation of the American forces in II Corps with all possible speed in order to make an attack already directed by 18 Army Group. Intensive training, re-equipping, reorganization, and application of all lessons thus far learned, and careful planning of the logistics of the attack, were to come first, along with an effort to instill in American forces a spirit of genuine partnership with the British forces. Patton was advised to train all combat forces, rather than engineers alone, in detection and removal of mines and in the proper use of mines for defensive purposes. He was also advised to

[5] (1) Intervs, Alexander with Mathews, 10–15 Jan 49. (2) CinC AF Diary, 1–5 Mar 43. (3) Msg 4267, Eisenhower to Marshall, 4 Mar 43; Msg 4580, Eisenhower to Marshall, 5 Mar 43; Msg 3471, Marshall to Eisenhower, 8 Mar 43. Smith Papers. (4) Gen Ward, Personal Diary, 1–5 Mar 43. In private possession. (5) Omar N. Bradley, *A Soldier's Story* (New York, 1951), pp. 41–48.



LT. GEN. GEORGE S. PATTON, JR., *and General Eisenhower conferring at beginning of II Corps offensive, Tunisia, 16 March 1943.*

demonstrate the fact that the 37-mm. antitank gun could knock out the German Mark IV tank with the latest ammunition. Eisenhower, with Patton's well-known personal courage in mind, then remarked, "I want you as a Corps commander, not as a casualty." And, he added: "You must not retain for one instant any man in a responsible position where you have become doubtful of his ability to do the job. . . . This matter frequently calls for more courage than any other thing you will have to do, but I expect you to be perfectly cold-blooded about it. . . . I will give you the best available replacement or stand by any arrangement you want to make." [6]

General Eisenhower's staff received a new G–2, a position held by a British officer in view of the extensive use of British sources of information in the Mediterranean. The change was prompted by the fact that excessive reliance on one type of intelligence leading to a misinterpretation of the enemy's intentions had contributed to the setback at Sidi Bou Zid. Brig. Kenneth D. W. Strong, a former British military attaché in Berlin, was sent from the United Kingdom by General Brooke to relieve Brig. Eric E. Mockler-Ferryman at Algiers.[7]

Ground Forces Reorganize

The reorganization of Allied ground forces was intended to include the formation of reserves at each level of command. The arrival in Tunisia of British 9 Corps headquarters and troops (Lt. Gen. Sir John Crocker), to be followed during March and early April by the British 1st and 4th Divisions, would facilitate the creation of reserves. But in the interval before their arrival, the policy was incompatible with current battle requirements and with the principle of keeping divisions intact, and was also hampered in execution by the process of sorting out all units into national sectors. General Alexander ordered the transfer into 18 Army Group reserve of Headquarters, British 9 Corps, British 6th Armoured Division, and British 78th Division. The scheduled shift was delayed to meet General Anderson's needs for infantry with which to push the enemy back from the hills north of Medjez el Bab, but by 12 March the reserve was established. General Keightley's 6th Armoured Division then passed under General Crocker's command and resumed the process of refitting with Sherman tanks, a process beginning when the enemy attacked at Sidi Bou Zid. First Army was forced to do without substantial reserves for the next six weeks, and required British 5 Corps to dispose its troops subject to a possible need to send reinforcements to the sector of French XIX Corps. Under the plan of 12 February, 18 Army Group had contemplated thinning out the front line in order to obtain reserves. Early in March they expected that the Allied front would be shortened by British Eighth Army's northward progress, enabling one American division then to be shifted from the extreme southern part of the U.S. II Corps area to the extreme north of British 5 Corps zone. The remainder of the II Corps would sideslip northward perhaps as far as the Pichon–Maktar highway, while the French XIX Corps moved northward as far as the

[6] CinC AF Diary, 7 Mar 43, Bk. V, pp. 270–71.

[7] (1) Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, p. 147. (2) CinC AF Diary, 20 Feb 43, Bk. V, p. A–236. (3) Msg 1977, FREEDOM to TROOPERS, 20 Feb 43; Msg 65014, TROOPERS to FREEDOM, 20 Feb 43. ETOUSA Incoming and Outgoing Cbls, Kansas City Rcds Ctr.

Pont-du-Fahs–Bou Arada road and its immediate approaches from the north.[8]

After the completion of the February battles, the Allied main line of resistance extended from Cap Serrat to El Ma el Abiod, running east of Sidi Nsir, Medjez el Bab, Bou Arada, Djebel Bargou (1266), Djebel Serdj (1357), Kesra, Sbiba gap, Djebel Semmama (1356), and Djebel Chambi (1544). It covered the lateral road from Djebel Abiod to Bédja, a great advantage to British 5 Corps, and the approaches to the plain of Tunis along either side of the Medjerda river. The front covered main gaps in the Western Dorsal from Maktar to Sbiba, and thence to the southwestern extremity of the mountain chain. (*Map 13*) The main landing fields in the Medjerda valley, the air landing grounds between Le Kef and Thala, and the airfields near Tébessa were protected, but the Thélepte airfields were left open to the enemy and were to be recaptured, if necessary, as a preliminary step in the forthcoming Allied offensive.

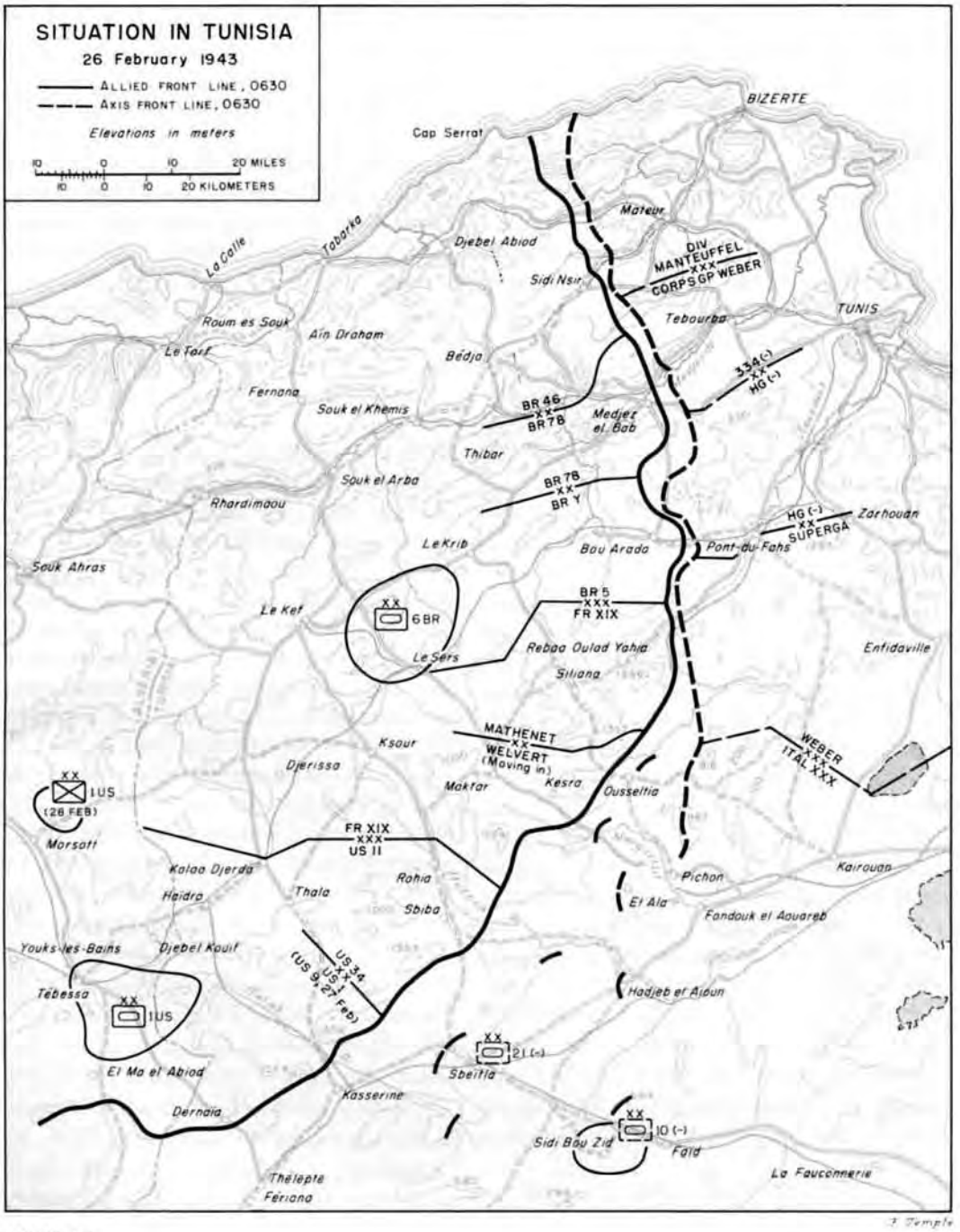
British 5 Corps (46th, 78th, and 6th Armoured Divisions) held the front from Cap Serrat to the mountains north of the Rebaa Oulad Yahia valley, and included within its zone Le Kef and Souk Ahras.

French XIX Corps, commanded by General Koeltz with headquarters at Djerissa, defended the next zone to the south. It comprised Divisions Mathenet and Welvert, with eight regiments of French infantry, two groups of Tabors, and the British 36 Brigade (reinforced). Its front extended into the mountains at a point northeast of Sbiba. The U.S. II Corps held the remainder of the front. The 34th Division, reassigned to II Corps, held the northeast sector and the 1st Infantry Division (after 27 February, the 9th Infantry Division), the southwest sector. Nearer Tébessa, the 1st Armored Division (and beginning 28 February, the 1st Infantry Division) prepared for the forthcoming offensive. Headquarters, II Corps, was at Djebel Kouif.[9]

The American divisions in II Corps required a certain amount of strengthening and reorganization. General Ryder's 34th Division needed to reorganize and rehabilitate the 168th Infantry, which had lost its commanding officer (Col. Thomas D. Drake) and much of its strength near Sidi Bou Zid. Col. Frederic B. Butler, from G–3, II Corps, became its new commander. General Ryder also sought the restitution to the 133d Infantry of its 2d Battalion, which was still being used in the AFHQ security detachment at Algiers, and requested thirty-six 105-mm. howitzers to replace the badly worn 25-pounder guns of the division artillery. The 9th Division, which was moving east under command of Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy during the Kasserine battles, lacked one of its regiments, the 39th Infantry. The 39th had been scattered since the Allied landings, doing guard duty along the line of communications, or at the Biskra airdrome, or fighting in Central Tunisia. The division had not yet fought as a unit and

[8] (1) 18 A Gp Opn Instruc 6, 6 Mar 43, supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (2) First Army Opn Instruc 19–22, 24 Feb–8 Mar 43. DRB AGO. (3) Msg, USFOR to FREEDOM, 2135, 26 Feb 43. ETOUSA Outgoing Cables, Kansas City Reds Ctr.

[9] (1) First Army Opn Instruc 19, 24 Feb 43. DRB AGO. (2) First Army Sitrep 123, 28 Feb 43; 18 A Gp Cositrep 7, 26 Feb 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log. (3) DMC Jnl, 28 Feb 43. (4) By 17 March French XIX Corps had a strength which approximated 53,800, including British units in the corps troops. See 18 A Gp SD 1, 17 Mar 43. AFHQ Joint Rearmament Committee 370/001, and also in AFHQ G–3 (Ops) 37/13, Micro Job 10C, Reel 157F.


SITUATION IN TUNISIA
26 February 1943
ALLIED FRONT LINE, 0630
AXIS FRONT LINE, 0630
Elevations in meters
10 0 10 20 MILES
10 0 10 20 KILOMETERS
BIZERTE
Cap Serrat
Mateur
La Calle
Tabarka
Djebel Abiod
DIV MANTEUFFEL
CORPS GP WEBER
Sidi Nsir
Tebourba
TUNIS
Roum es Souk
Ain Draham
Le Tarf
Bédja
334(-)
HG(-)
Fernana
Souk el Khemis
BR 46
BR 78
Medjez el Bab
Thibar
Souk el Arba
BR 78
BR Y
Rhardimaou
HG(-)
SUPERGA
Zarhouan
Le Krib
Bou Arada
Pont-du-Fahs
Souk Ahras
Le Kef
6 BR
BR 5
FR XIX
Le Sers
Rebaa Oulad Yahia
Siliana
Enfidaville
MATHENET
WELVERT
(Moving in)
Ksour
Djerissa
WEBER
ITAL XXX
Maktar
Kesra
Ousseltia
1 US
(26 FEB)
Morsott
FR XIX
US II
Kalaa Djerda
Rohia
Pichon
Kairouan
Haidra
Thala
Sbiba
El Ala
Fondouk el Aouareb
Youks-les-Bains
Djebel Kouif
US 34
US 1
(US 9, 27 Feb)
Tebessa
1 US
Hadjeb el Aioun
El Ma el Abiod
21(-)
Sbeitla
Kasserine
Dernaia
Sidi Bou Zid
10(-)
Faid
La Fauconnerie
Thelepte
Feriana

MAP 13

remained in need of seasoning. The 1st Armored Division required replacement of severe losses in men and matériel. Furthermore, General Ward and others deemed this division too large. Its current core—six battalions of tanks, three of armored infantry, and three of armored artillery—was sufficiently large to invite endless detachment of units, and perhaps too cumbersome for the most efficient employment. Any such major change on the eve of the Allied attack was considered imprudent, but the problem was eventually met by modifying the table of organization. General Allen's 1st Infantry Division needed to recover from French XIX Corps the elements of the 26th Infantry still under General Koeltz's command while the rest of the division was concentrating for its first action as a division in Tunisia.[10]

The new commander of the II Corps attempted to transmit to his entire command the aggressive spirit with which he himself was animated, and to expedite preparations for the forthcoming attack. General Patton drove his principal subordinates and moved with restless energy throughout this area. His regime substituted military decorum for all traces of casualness, and required "spit and polish" as a preventive against carelessness. Some of Patton's methods to stamp his personal leadership on the entire II Corps seemed trivial to those on whom they were imposed. Changes which some might attribute to Patton's methods were perhaps also traceable to the lessons learned by troops in combat. The II Corps matured, working at its job, looking ahead more than it looked back, and needing more than anything else successes to boost its morale.[11]

The New Allied Air Command

Almost simultaneously with the activation of 18 Army Group late on 19 February, a new system of control over Allied aviation came into effect. At Algiers, the Mediterranean Air Command under Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder began to function on 18 February, having at its disposal the Twelfth Air Force and Royal Air Force (RAF) Eastern Air Command, the Ninth Air Force, and three RAF commands—Middle East, Malta, and Gibraltar. These components were grouped by areas into the Middle East Air Command, Malta Air Command, and Northwest African Air Forces. The last of these was reorganized into functional organizations. General Spaatz, its commander, maintained an administrative echelon of his headquarters in Algiers but kept his operations headquarters at Constantine and made it a combined organization of American and British officers. The Northwest African Strategic Air Forces headquarters under General Doolittle controlled bombers and their fighter escorts from airfields near Constantine. The U.S. XII Bomber Command and two squadrons of British Wellington bombers continued to furnish the main long-range bombing strength. The Northwest African Tactical Air Force fell under command of Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham, who assumed control over the Allied Air Support Command (with General Kuter as deputy) a day or two before its redesignation, and established a combined operations headquarters adjacent to the new location of

[10] (1) Msg 1233, Adv AFHQ (Truscott) to AFHQ (Eisenhower), 1 Mar 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log. (2) Ltr, Truscott to Ward, 2 Mar 43. In private possession.

[11] Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, pp. 44–45.

Headquarters, First Army, at Laverdure.[12] There General Alexander set up the advanced command post of 18 Army Group and shared facilities in a way which contributed to the maximum effectiveness of the Tactical Air Force, on the one hand, and the fullest use of First Army's resources on the other.[13]

Future collaboration between ground and air elements of the Allied Force was to benefit from the proximity of the respective commanders, but its fundamental basis was their past association in the Egyptian-Libyan desert, where they had together tested a successful doctrine of air support. Air Marshal Coningham controlled the U.S. XII Air Support Command and RAF 242d Group from the first, and resumed control over the Western Desert Air Force after it was transferred on 21 February to Northwest African Air Forces. These air commands were married to the major ground commands: XII Air Support Command with U.S. II Corps, RAF 242d Group with British First Army, and Western Desert Air Force with Eighth Army, as heretofore. So much for organization. What mattered far more than the fact of marriage was the nature of the marriage contract. The doctrine developed in the Western Desert of close union between air and ground forces had an eloquent and determined practitioner in the new commander of Northwest African Tactical Air Force.

The fundamental premises of the new program to be applied in Tunisia were that ground troops would benefit most from a lasting Allied supremacy over the enemy air force and that, in view of the limited Allied resources in air power, no operational air unit should remain unemployed, or be sent to a minor target. In accordance with these premises, control over tactical air units had to be centralized and missions had to be assigned to them by a commander fully conversant with their capabilities under varying military conditions, and thus able to determine priorities among competing projects. With such an arrangement, the offensive use of Allied air promised results cumulative in their value for Allied ground and air elements alike. Air umbrellas over ground troops were henceforth to be abandoned in favor of strikes on the bases from which enemy flights originated. The bombers making these strikes would be escorted by the fighter planes which might otherwise have put in hours of protective cover over ground troops without damaging the enemy.[14] To summarize, the reorganization of 19–20 February 1943 was destined, through use of the ground-air doctrines tested in Libya, to promote by painful but inexorable steps the achievement of Allied air supremacy in Tunisia.[15]

In addition to the Northwest African Strategic and Tactical Air Forces, General

[12] On 19 February he announced that he had instructed all his command "to cease defensive operations involving cover for troops except in special circumstances and with his approval." Offensive action to maximum capacity should replace such use. Msg AI 24, Allied ASC 18 A Gp to First Army *et al.*, 19 Feb 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

[13] (1) Intervs, Alexander with Mathews, 10–15 Jan 49. (2) Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces*, II, 161–64. (3) Info supplied by Air Ministry, London.

[14] FM 31–35, Air-Ground Operations, 9 Apr 42.

[15] (1) Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces*, II, 136–37, 164–65. (2) See also Col. Kent Roberts Greenfield, *Army Ground Forces and the Air-Ground Battle Team, Including Organic Light Aviation*, AGF Hist Sec, Study 35, 1948, pp. 1–5, which shows how far Army Air Forces doctrine had already gone toward integrating the effort of air and ground forces by 9 April 1942.

Spaatz's command included the Coastal Air Forces (controlled from Algiers in conjunction with the headquarters of the Naval Commander in Chief, Mediterranean), the Training Command, the Air Forces Service Command, and a Photographic Reconnaissance Wing.

The new air organization, particularly the Tactical Air Force, set about preparing airfields at sites appropriate for the expected pattern of ground operations, and establishing a radar warning and control system with which to apply new principles of air support. The mountains seriously impaired the effectiveness of radar, while the lack of telephonic communication between dispersed installations was likewise a handicap. Radio communication had to make up for the deficiencies in wire lines.

By 11 March, an outline plan of air operations in three successive phases was ready. Headquarters, 18 Army Group, and Tactical Air Force were then encamped near Aïn Beïda, from which they could cooperate during the imminent operations at the Mareth Position. The XII Air Support Command and RAF 242d Group were expected to make successive shifts onto new or improved airfields nearer the coast. A tactical bomber force of light and medium bombers was assembled and organized in the vicinity of Canrobert, northwest of Aïn Beïda. The XII Air Support Command prepared to concentrate at Thélepte, where the existing fields, once reoccupied, would be improved and supplemented, and like that at Youks-les-Bains, would be stocked with enough matériel to provide a surplus for the Western Desert Air Force's use when it came north. The airfields at Kalaa Djerda and Sbeïtla were to be improved, the former for the use of bombers. The Western Desert Air Force was expected to devote itself independently to supporting British Eighth Army in the main action. XII Air Support Command and RAF 242d Group were to assail the enemy air forces, carry out tactical reconnaissance, and assist night bombing on the line of communications.

Once Gafsa had been taken by the U.S. II Corps, and while the British Eighth Army was closing in on Gàbes, a second phase of air operations was envisaged in the air outline plan of 11 March. It would have two aspects. A shift eastward and northeastward by those engaged in airfield construction, radar erection, and supply would be paralleled by interference with the Axis air movement up the coast. In this phase, the operations of XII Air Support Command and Western Desert Air Force would have to be co-ordinated, and the latter would find airfields and supplies ready for it near Gafsa and at Thélepte. Preparations would be completed for the use during the final stage of airfields in the area from Souk el Arba and Souk el Khemis to Le Kef, Le Sers, and Thibar. (*See Map V.*)

Air Marshal Coningham held a commanders' conference at Canrobert on 12 March at which it was agreed that once the battle for the Mareth Position had begun, XII Air Support Command and RAF 242d Group would attempt round-the-clock strikes on enemy airfields near Gabès. Western Desert Air Force might thus retain air supremacy over the battle area with lighter opposition and with greater capacity to engage ground targets in co-ordination with the Army elements. As the day for the initial Allied operations arrived, intermittent bad weather reduced the number of air strikes on enemy landing fields. They were begun on 13 March and taken up from time

to time by units of the Strategic Air Force as well as the Tactical Air Force.[16]

Allied Preparations in the Communications Zone

Like the forward area, the rear was reorganized and strengthened for the resumption of the Allied offensive in March. The accumulation of forces preparing for the eventual invasion of Sicily augmented the total number of military personnel with a corresponding increase in the complexity of the agencies which supervised and supported combat troops. Algiers in particular was crowded with American and British personnel in addition to members of the French civil and military establishments. The process of Allied military build-up in Algiers had begun long before the planning for March. AFHQ filled up the Hotel St. Georges, the Hotel Alexandra, and other buildings which were converted to office space, and spilled over into several other buildings; it also occupied several hundred different officer billets. The troops assigned or attached to the headquarters command, and other units quartered temporarily in the vicinity of Algiers, added to the Allied military traffic. Antiaircraft batteries and smoke projector units, car and truck companies, military police, signal communications, postal and radio censorship units, and the workers engaged in servicing records—all the varied and extensive aspects of the modern great army headquarters contributed to the Allied military population in Algiers in ever-increasing numbers.

The North African Theater of Operations, U.S. Army (NATOUSA), was activated at Algiers on 4 February 1943, to handle the administrative concerns of the growing American Army forces in the area, matters which were not properly a subject for Allied action. At first, like the commanding general, most of its military personnel doubled as both Allied Force and theater officers. Later, when some whole sections of AFHQ were transferred to comparable staff sections of NATOUSA, the total strength of the staffs in Algiers was still unaffected. But in the course of time, largely as a result of a determination to undertake more and more projects, the total grew. A substantial number of the units of AFHQ were operational rather than supervisory agencies. They pursued their projects with great energy, intent on doing everything possible to make them succeed. By April, AFHQ exceeded 2,000 officers and enlisted men, illustrating how military, like civil administrative establishments, tend to grow and rarely to dwindle.[17]

The supply organization in the communications zone with which to meet the requirements of the March offensive was created during the preceding month. Brig. Gen. Everett S. Hughes, who had been engaged in ETOUSA on the logistical problems connected with Operation TORCH, arrived on 12 February in Algiers to be deputy theater commander and commanding general of the communications zone. An Eastern Base Section at Constantine to supply the requirements of U.S. II Corps was constituted on 13 February under command of Col. Arthur W. Pence and opened on 27 February. With the Atlantic Base Section

[16] (1) Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces*, II, 167–75. (2) Info supplied by Air Ministry, London.

[17] (1) Hist of AFHQ and NATOUSA, Pt. II, pp. 240–45. (2) General Eisenhower's directive as theater commander is Message ZRH–2624, AGWAR to FREEDOM, 20 February 1943. OPD Msg Ctr File.

at Casablanca and the Mediterranean Base Section at Oran, the Eastern Base Section came under the direct control of General Larkin as Commanding General, Services of Supply, NATOUSA. The flow of matériel to General Patton's corps was to occur within the broader pattern of Allied build-up for the operations in Tunisia, the campaign being planned for Sicily, and perhaps additional undertakings in the Mediterranean. Supplies for II Corps had to be forwarded in a manner minimizing interference with the British Line of Communication to First Army, which in January had passed to the control of AFHQ from Headquarters, First Army.

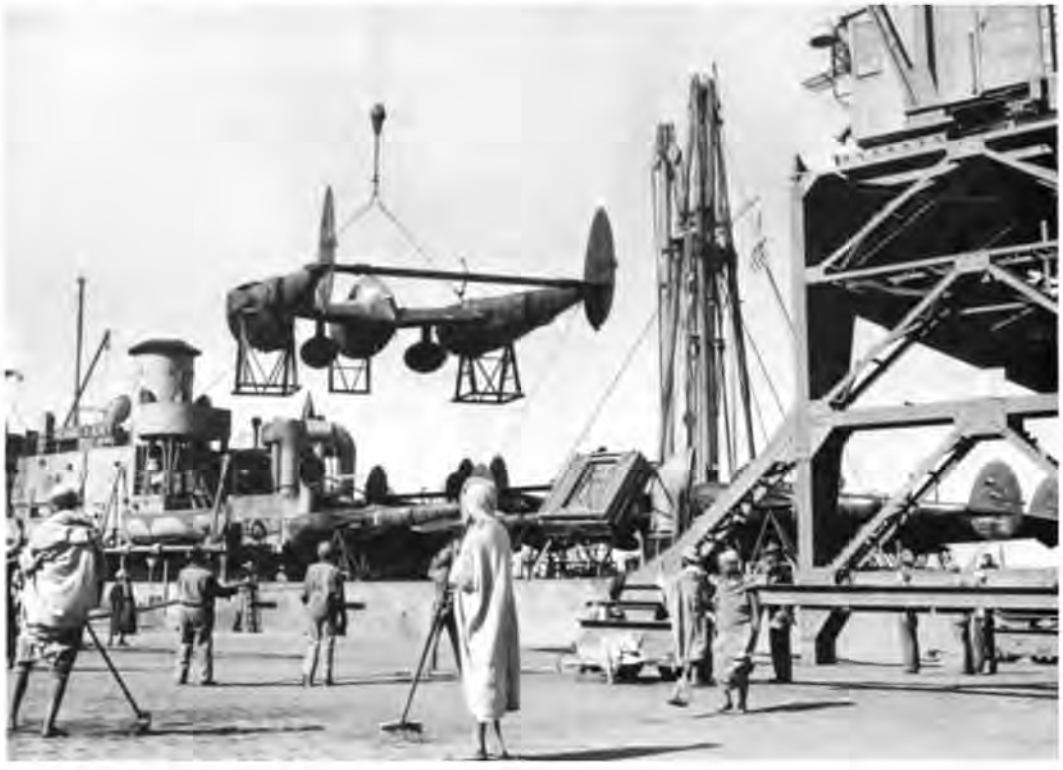
Maj. Gen. J. G. W. Clark (Br.), commanding No. 1 Line of Communications Area from headquarters at Sétif, with subareas at Algiers, Bougie, Philippeville, Bône, Constantine, and Souk Ahras, reported to Maj. Gen. Humfrey Gale (Br.), Chief Administrative Officer, AFHQ.[18] With the three American base sections and the coordinating Headquarters, Services of Supply, NATOUSA, reporting to the deputy theater commander while the British Line of Communication reported to the chief administrative officer, and with a separation of American and British maintenance impossible, and indeed in many respects undesirable, the problems were met as they arose by steady co-operation between Generals Hughes and Gale. The disproportionately low ratio of service to combat troops with which the early operations in Northwest Africa had been undertaken was raised during the first four months of 1943.[19]

Allied plans in outline for logistical support were sketched at AFHQ on 27 February in a conference over which the chief administrative officer, General Gale, presided, and at which Maj. Gen. C. H. Miller (Br.) of 18 Army Group described the prospects. First Army's supply base would be at Bône, while II Corps would draw on the new Eastern Base Section at Constantine.[20] Each army would be responsible for deliveries forward of these advanced bases. While First Army would maintain the air elements in its northern area, Line of Communication, Third Area Service Command, near Constantine would supply those in the southern sector and along the Constantine–Tébessa axis. In addition to the motor transport allotted to each army and for AFHQ reserve, a special reserve for British Eighth Army was to be accumulated in the Constantine area on a scale to be determined by 18 Army Group. Participation by British troops and air units in operations to the south would be assisted by stocking gasoline and ammunition at accessible points. The principal maintenance center for tanks was to be at Le Kroub, near

[18] (1) Hist of AFHQ and NATOUSA, Pt. II, pp. 175–76, 215–17. (2) Trans Sec EBS NATOUSA Hist Rcds, 22 Feb–30 Apr 43. OCT HB. (3) Col. Creswell G. Blakeney, ed., *Logistical History of NATOUSA-MTOUSA, 11 August 1942 to 30 November 1945* (Naples, Italy, 1946), p. 23.

[19] The problem remained difficult at Casablanca at the time of a visit by the Assistant Secretary of War, John McCloy. McCloy reported this situation in a memo for Maj. Gen. Wilhelm D. Styer, 22 March 1943. General Handy's comments are found in his memo for the Commanding General, Army Service Forces (Attention: General Styer), 27 March, subject: Report of the Assistant Secretary of War on conditions in Casablanca. OPD 381 Africa (1–27–43), Sec 2, Item 89.

[20] U.S. II Corps was under First Army until 2400, 8 Mar 42, thereafter under 18 Army Group. Info supplied by the British Cabinet Office, London.



UNLOADING P-38 FIGHTER PLANES *for the French Army, Casablanca, 13 April 1943. Note Arab helpers on the dock.*

Constantine, with facilities at Bône for servicing Churchill tanks.[21]

By March, the expansion of Allied logistical support which had been envisaged since the end of December began to reflect the result of the arrangements then made. The main ports of Casablanca and Oran, and the satellite ports near them, stepped up their operations. The Sixth Port of Embarkation (Mobile) at Casablanca and the Third Port of Embarkation (Mobile) at Oran were reinforced by two and three port battalions, respectively. Each port employed several hundred Arab laborers on the docks

[21] (1) Notes of AFHQ Log Plans Sec Mtg (signed by Lt Col J. C. Dalton), 27 Feb 43, dated 1 Mar 43, sub: Admin policy for development of adv opns base in Tunisia. OCMH. (2) 18 A Gp Admin Instruc 1, 4 Mar 43, supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

(3) Plans in late January set the daily tonnage estimated for the troops in Tunisia as follows:

	1–15 March	16–30 March
Total	3,675	4,205
First Army [a]	1,900	2,380
Twelfth Air Force [b]	1,155	1,205
Line of Communication [c]	620	620

[a] Including U.S. and French forces under First Army command and RAF in First Army area.

[b] East of Algiers.

[c] Including RAF not in First Army area and French forces on line of communication.

Source: Memo, CofS AFHQ for CG First Army, 29 Jan 43, sub: Orgn and prep for renewal of offensive. AFHQ G-3 Ops 58/2.1, Micro Job 10C, Reel 188D.

and also contracted with French companies to assist in unloading operations. For the Eastern Base Section at Constantine, the port of Philippeville was made available. It was dredged to a twenty-two-foot depth, which permitted four partially loaded Liberty ships and two coasters to discharge cargo simultaneously; the port was equipped with cranes, hoists, and other cargo-handling machinery which expedited the unloading process.[22] On occasion, LST's could run from Oran to Philippeville with replacement tanks which then went on transporters over the road to the vicinity of Tébessa. For the operations in April, the deeper port of Bône was also to be shared with the British Line of Communication and was greatly increased in cargo-receiving capacity. But in March, the 91,000 tons which passed through Philippeville in addition to that brought by rail and highway from the west met the requirements of the U.S. II Corps and the XII Air Support Command, and made possible the accumulation of reserves on which the British Eighth Army could shortly draw.[23]

Railroad and highway transportation across French North Africa were both greatly expanded by March through the work of engineers and the Transportation Corps, U.S. Army. A very large requisition for railroad rolling stock which was made when the Allied drive on Tunis failed in December began to be filled in March, by which time managing and operating personnel for this equipment had also arrived. Before the end of April, forty-three trains, averaging over 10,700 tons daily, were passing through Constantine toward the combat zone.[24]

Expanded highway transport was essential for the accumulation of matériel for the Allied campaigns of the spring. A special convoy arriving on 6–7 March brought more than 4,500 two-and-one-half-ton trucks into Casablanca and Oran.[25] Other convoys brought more than 2,000 per month. Great assembly plants processed the twin-unit-packed crates of trucks. Companies and battalions of truck drivers to operate them were combed out of various units. One battalion which was formed in the Casablanca area had its trucks loaded with high-priority cargo, and, within a week of arrival, started in convoy to Ouled Rahmoun about 1,000 miles away. The battalion arrived there on 23 March with an excellent record. Road maintenance, traffic control posts and stations, and good organization stepped up highway traffic until, late in March, the average number of vehicles reaching Orléansville daily eastward-bound was 600; in the area of the Eastern Base Section, some 1,500 trucks and 4,500 troops were supplementing the railroad. From Ouled Rahmoun and Bône to Tébessa, the daily transportation then came to 500 tons or more.[26] Clearing the ports

[22] Trans Sec EBS NATOUSA, 22 Feb–30 Apr 43, pp. 7–8. OCT HB.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 22, citing rpt of Maj Arthur G. Siegle, OCT, 9 Apr 43.

[24] (1) Memo, Brig Gen Carl R. Gray, Jr., for Deputy Chief of Trans NATOUSA, 1 May 43, cited in H. H. Dunham, U.S. Army Transportation and the Conquest of North Africa, 1942–1943, Hist Unit OCT, Jan 45, p. 208. (2) Bykofsky and Larson, *The Transportation Corps: Operations Overseas.*

[25] Memo, Lt Col Edwin C. Greiner for Brig Gen Robert H. Wylie, 3 Feb 43, sub: Cargo for UGS 5-A; Memo, Gen Wylie for Gen Styer, 25 Feb 43, sub: Cargo shipped on UGS 5½. OCT HB.

[26] (1) Trans Sec EBS NATOUSA Hist Rcds, 22 Feb–30 Apr 43, p. 12. (2) Dunham, U.S. Army Transportation and the Conquest of North Africa, 1942–1943, Hist Unit OCT, Jan 45, pp. 263, 266, 268.

and railroad terminals and conveying supplies from depots to dumps required the service of hundreds of trucks in addition to those used in the longer convoys. Including local hauling, the Eastern Base Section recorded movement in April of a total of 51,541 truck loads amounting to almost 84,000 tons.[27]

While the vast bulk of overland traffic was eastward bound, salvaged matériel began to flow back for reconditioning and repair. At Oran and Casablanca, the outward-bound cargo transports were loaded with French North African products such as cork and phosphates, or with scrap iron, until their return loads were almost half as heavy as those which they had brought.

Substantial numbers of the personnel brought to French North Africa in the spring troop convoys came there to prepare for the invasion of Sicily or to join the U.S. Fifth Army. Much of the matériel being unloaded at the ports in March was intended to remain in Morocco and western Algeria, either to be used by troops in the communications zone or to sustain the French and native civilian population. Even so, the volume of supplies which kept arriving at Casablanca, Oran, and the ports near them dwarfed the total which was reaching Tunisia from the northeast to support the Axis forces.[28] It was apparent by the end of March that in Tunisia the Americans alone were being supplied at a higher rate than all the Axis forces there.[29] Before the Allied offensive in March, replacement depots ("repple-depples") were established near Oran and Casablanca with a total capacity exceeding 11,000.[30]

Preparations by the French

The rearmament of the French under Giraud to which the President had agreed in principle at Anfa, and which had required much subsequent negotiation, began to take form while the Allied forces in Tunisia reorganized. The main problem was that of cargo space and convoying, although other difficulties also had to be overcome. In accordance with a supplementary understanding, a special convoy of fifteen ships loaded with matériel for the French was to be en route from the United States by the time the Allies began their March offensive in southern Tunisia. Ten more ships would be sent later.

The weapons and equipment to arrive in April would, when distributed to French units, make ready two infantry divisions, two armored regiments, three tank destroyer battalions, three reconnaissance battalions, twelve antiaircraft battalions (40-mm.), and ten truck companies. Beginning a little later, American planes would start arriving at the rate of 60 per month until they reached a total exceeding 200 fighters, dive bombers, and transports. Training of aerial gunners could commence in April and of pilots in June, at the rate of 100 for each of the first two months and 50 per month thereafter. Within French North Africa, training in the operation and maintenance of Ameri-

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 269.

[28] In March, 146,000 tons were discharged in Moroccan ports and 220,000 tons in Oran, Arzew, and Mostaganem. Chiefly by reshipment, 91,000 tons came into Philippeville.

[29] Eastern Base Section was getting 1,000 tons per day *by truck alone* into Tébessa. Axis importations in March came to less than 29,267 tons. No account is taken in this comparison of what the British First and Eighth Armies were then obtaining. (See Appendix B.)

[30] Maj Gen William H. Simpson, Obsr's Rpt, 27 May 43. AGF 319.1/58.

can matériel would begin before these shipments arrived.

This program was considerably slower and smaller than the one Giraud had anticipated after sampling the President's buoyant encouragement in January at Casablanca. The curtailment actually resulted from the many competing claims upon American munitions and upon Allied shipping, but Giraud was encouraged to believe that by more liberal administrative policies in French North Africa he could expedite the rate at which American arms would be delivered to his forces. Although Giraud may indeed have suffered some loss in prestige from the dragging pace of French rearmament, his political difficulties arose mainly from his disdain for such questions, his belief both that the fundamental objective of military success over the Axis powers transcended all other considerations, and that any attention which he had to give to politics constituted an intrusion on his concern with more important affairs. He leaned heavily on French political advisers and his political decisions were subjected to the close scrutiny of the Allied commander in chief, such scrutiny being exercised with the aid of Mr. Robert Murphy and Mr. Harold Macmillan. The consistent position of the Allied leadership was that conditions of political tranquillity conducive to immediate military advantage must be maintained, and that these conditions should, if possible, be made to prevail without forfeiting French unity or general future support by the French when the main Allied effort would be made on the soil of Continental Europe.[31]

Giraud was finally persuaded, after himself sensing political opinion in the French armed forces under his control, that unity on any terms acceptable to General de Gaulle could not be soon achieved. He therefore proceeded to revamp his government while reconstructing the French Army with American arms. On 6 February and 14 March 1943, under Allied guidance, he announced the termination of Darlan's Imperial Council of provincial governors and of all the fictitious ties with Vichy. He himself assumed complete power over all civil and military authorities in French North and French West Africa. He declared that he would be advised by a War Committee in which the former members of the Imperial Council would be joined by other Frenchmen. Political prisoners and refugees were to be released from detention at once. Organizations of Vichy origin, like the *Service d'Ordre Légionnaire,* were to be suppressed. Administrative councils representing French and native groups would be formed to advise and assist the governors of all colonies and municipalities. He instigated a trip to London by one of de Gaulle's leading adherents in Algiers, Professor René Capitant, to furnish the Fighting French leader with a trustworthy, first-hand report of conditions. Giraud became increasingly receptive to liberal advice, including that from M. Jean Monnet, who went from the United States to assist him in Algiers. On the eve of the Allied offensive, he thus had taken a considerable step away from an authoritarian attitude toward French political republicanism, and had also opened negotiations through General Catroux for a merger with the Fighting French in London.[32]

[31] (1) CinC AF Diary, Bk. V, pp. A–258–59. (2) Giraud, *Un seul but: la victoire,* p. 121. (3) Msg, FREEDOM (Murphy) to AGWAR (Hull), 13 Dec 42. AFHQ Micro Job 24, Reel 78D.

[32] Georges Catroux, *Dans la bataille de Méditerranée; Égypte, Levant, Afrique du Nord, 1940–1944* (Paris, 1949), pp. 325–30, 340–49.

CHAPTER XXVI

The Enemy Strives To Retain the Initiative

The Allies were not allowed to regroup, reorganize, and prepare for the mid-March offensive without engaging in some bitter battles. The respite gained in central Tunisia had no parallel in northern Tunisia. Here von Arnim had plans of his own for resuming the offensive. On 22 February Kesselring, after approving Rommel's decision to break off his attack at Thala and Djebel el Hamra (1112), had authorized von Arnim to prepare an attack that would keep the Allies under pressure in the north while Rommel's forces were withdrawing to regroup for their attack against Montgomery's forces in the south. The *Fifth Panzer Army* operation, timed to facilitate Rommel's disengagement, was to push back the Allied lines in the north and expand the narrow bridgehead protecting the vital Axis supply bases of Tunis and Bizerte.[1] Von Arnim immediately held a conference with his subordinates to discuss possible plans. He could attack either in Manteuffel's sector along the coast or in Weber's zone in the Medjez el Bab area. In either case the commander might hold and firmly defend the newly gained positions or, after a spoiling attack, withdraw to his original lines.[2]

Early in the afternoon of the next day von Arnim decided on a spoiling attack in the Medjez el Bab area. He charged *Corps Group Weber* with this limited attack which was to jump off on 26 February. Von Arnim chose this solution after it had become painfully evident to him that he lacked the strength for a bigger operation. He picked Medjez el Bab as the objective mainly because to shift major elements to von Manteuffel's sector would have been too time-consuming.[3]

Von Arnim had already begun to assemble the forces at his disposal. He stopped *Group Lang's* perfunctory attack on Maktar on 22 February and ordered these units to assemble farther north. By scraping the barrel, he gathered some six battalions of varied composition and combat effectiveness and designated one Tiger and one panzer battalion to participate in the projected assault. But he lacked the main body of the *10th Panzer Division* which continued to be under Rommel's immediate control.

A Major Effort in the North Is Planned

At dawn on 24 February, von Arnim flew to Rome for a conference with Kesselring. He sent his operations officer to Sbeïtla

[1] Mins of Conf, Kesselring with von Arnim, evening 22 Feb 43, in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB IV,* 22 Feb 43.

[2] Mins of Conf, von Arnim with Weber, Manteuffel, and others, 2200, 22 Feb 43. *Ibid.*

[3] Mins of Conf, von Arnim with Weber, von Manteuffel, and others, 1400, 23 Feb 43. *Ibid.*



FIELD MARSHAL ALBERT KESSELRING

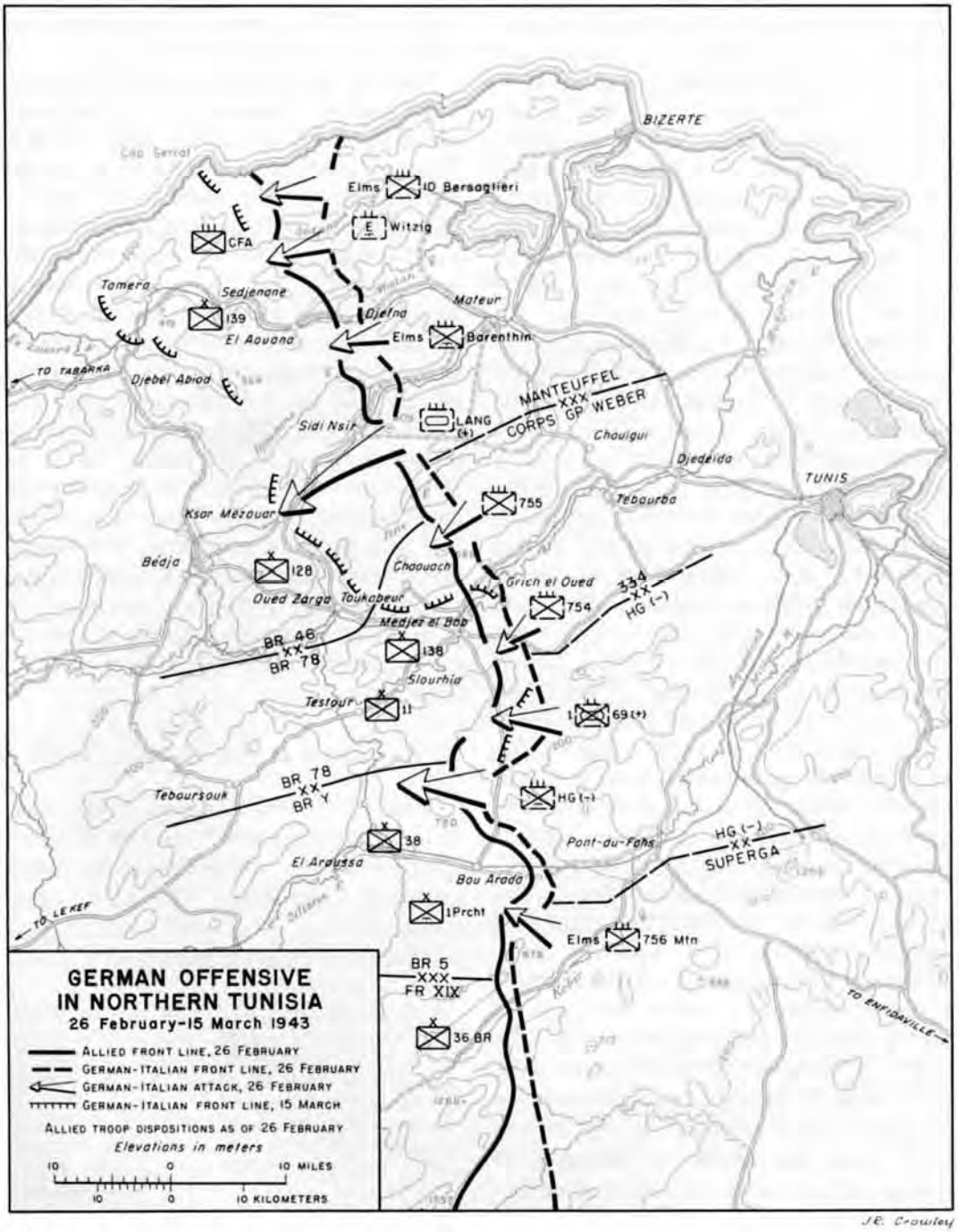
to brief Rommel on the limited Medjez el Bab attack on which he had decided the day before. From the Kesselring-von Arnim conference in Rome, however, emerged an entirely different plan, couched in a new direct order to von Arnim—*Fifth Panzer Army* was to launch a major offensive along its entire front from the coast to the Bou Arada valley with both von Manteuffel's and Weber's forces. The main effort, to be executed with the only armored force available, bolstered to 77 tanks by the temporary assignment of 15 Mark IV's from Rommel's *21st Panzer Division,* was to be directed at Sidi Nsir with Bédja as its objective.[4]

[4] These tanks had just arrived at Tunis for shipments to *21st Panzer Division. Fifth Panzer Army, KTB,* 24 Feb 43.

The attack was designed to gain for the Axis the much desired extension of the bridgehead westward to a new main line of resistance running from Djebel Abiod through Bédja to Testour and El Aroussa. This offensive went far beyond the mission so recently assigned to *Fifth Panzer Army* by *Comando Supremo* and it required considerable aplomb on Kesselring's part to explain his authorization to a highly astonished Ambrosio. Kesselring sent his assistant chief of staff, Colonel Westphal, to explain the new situation to Rommel and to request the field marshal to support von Arnim's drive by keeping *10th Panzer* and *21st Panzer Divisions* in positions capable of threatening Le Kef. Rommel was flabbergasted by this "completely unrealistic" concept contrived by what he later called the "nincompoops at *Comando Supremo.*" [5]

Despite Rommel's attitude, the *Fifth Panzer Army*'s attack order was issued on 25 February and the attack began on the next day. (*Map 14*) It was Kesselring's and von Arnim's assumption that available Allied reserves had already been withdrawn from the *Fifth Panzer Army* front as a result of Rommel's drive on Thala. To exploit a favorable situation, von Arnim planned a deep thrust toward Bédja. He charged *Corps Group Weber* with the main effort and Manteuffel with making a secondary attack nearer the coast. Weber's main objective was to be Bédja. Simultaneously he was to capture Medjez el Bab in a double-envelopment operation that would also de-

[5] (1) Conf, Ambrosio and Kesselring, 24 Feb 43, in Italian Collection, Item 26. (2) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB IV,* 24 Feb 43. (3) Msg, von Arnim to *Fifth Panzer Army,* 24 Feb 43, in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB, g. Kdos. (Chefsachen), 16.I.–20.II.43, Tunisien.* (4) Rommel, *Krieg ohne Hass,* pp. 363–64.


BIZERTE
Cap Serrat
Elms
10 Bersaglieri
Witzig
CFA
Tamera
Sedjenane
139
El Aouana
Djefna
Mateur
Elms
Barenthin
TO TABARKA
Djebel Abiod
MANTEUFFEL
XXX
CORPS
GP WEBER
LANG
(+)
Sidi Nsir
Chouigui
Djedeida
TUNIS
Tebourba
755
Ksar Mezouar
Bedja
128
Chaouach
Oued Zarga
Tourbabeur
Grich el Oued
754
334
XX
HG (-)
Medjez el Bab
BR 46
XX
BR 78
138
Slourhia
Testour
11
69 (+)
Teboursouk
BR 78
XX
BR Y
HG (-)
38
El Aroussa
Pont-du-Fahs
HG (-)
XX
SUPERGA
Bou Arada
1Prchl
TO LE KEF
Elms
756 Mtn
BR 5
XXX
FR XIX
36 BR
TO ENFIDAVILLE
GERMAN OFFENSIVE
IN NORTHERN TUNISIA
26 February-15 March 1943
ALLIED FRONT LINE, 26 FEBRUARY
GERMAN-ITALIAN FRONT LINE, 26 FEBRUARY
GERMAN-ITALIAN ATTACK, 26 FEBRUARY
GERMAN-ITALIAN FRONT LINE, 15 MARCH
ALLIED TROOP DISPOSITIONS AS OF 26 FEBRUARY
Elevations in meters
10 0 10 MILES
10 0 10 KILOMETERS
J.E. Crowley

MAP 14

stroy Allied forces at Bou Arada and gain the Siliana river between El Aroussa and Testour. Von Manteuffel was ordered to reduce the Allied positions at Djefna and win the Ez Zouara river sector near Djebel Abiod. For his attack von Manteuffel would have to draw chiefly upon the forces already committed in the line or held in reserve. In addition, he received reinforcement by one Tunis battalion. This brought his entire force to a strength of eight battalions.

Weber organized his attack forces in five groups. *Armored Group Lang* (with 77 tanks including 14 Tiger tanks) had the mission of moving by way of Manteuffel's sector to break through the Allied position at Sidi Nsir and drive on toward Bédja. *Group Eder* (*755th Grenadier Regiment,* reinforced) was to advance across Djebel el Ang (688), then, turning south, to destroy Allied units in the mountains near Chaouach and Toukabeur and cut the main highway between Bédja and Medjez el Bab east of Oued Zarga. *Group Audorff* (*754th Grenadier Regiment* [−]), reinforced by a battalion of infantry from the *Hermann Goering Division,* was to launch holding attacks opposite Medjez el Bab and subsequently open the route through the town. South of the Medjerda river *Group Schmid* (consisting of an armored infantry battalion of *10th Panzer Division,* the *Parachute Regiment, Hermann Goering* [−], and the *756th Mountain Regiment* of the *334th Infantry Division,* reinforced) was to assist with its northernmost force in the capture of Medjez el Bab by taking Slourhia and turning north to meet *Group Audorff;* the center force was to isolate Allied units on Djebel Rihane (720) near Bou Arada and subsequently reach the Siliana river sector in conjunction with the mountain regiment. The fifth group, consisting of the *47th Grenadier Regiment* (−) and two additional infantry battalions, was to be held in reserve.[6]

Von Arnim's plan was ambitious indeed, but if any two adjacent attacks succeeded, the Allies would be forced to pull back their lines and yield to the Axis forces a substantial advantage. The north-south road between Djebel Abiod and Bédja, for example, was the first good switch line in the mountains west of Tunis, a prize worth seeking. Encirclement of Medjez el Bab would give the Axis control of an important communications hub. Possession of El Aroussa would also gain for the Axis the crossroads east of it at Bou Arada, and in consequence a much greater margin of security for the Axis forces in Pont-du-Fahs. While even partial success could yield benefits of no little value to General von Arnim's command, the attacks would serve *Comando Supremo*'s original purpose by freeing the troops farther south from Allied interference during the necessary regrouping for Rommel's next offensive operations.

The Attack on the Northern Flank

The British 46th Division (Maj. Gen. H. A. Freeman-Attwood) held the northern part of the Allied front from the coast to and including Oued Zarga. The Allied radar station on Cap Serrat, with its small security force, used a track branching from the

[6] (1) FO, *Fifth Panzer Army* for Opn *OCHSENKOPF,* 25 Feb 43, and FO, *Corps Group Weber,* 25 Feb 43, in *334th Inf Div, Ia, Anlagen zum KTB, Band III, 11.–27.II.43* (cited hereafter as *334th Inf Div, KTB, Anlagenband III*). (2) FO, *Div von Manteuffel* for Opn *AUSLADUNG,* 25 Feb 43, in *Anlagenheft III zum Kriegstagebuch Nr. 2 der Div v. Manteuffel* (*Akte "Ausladung"*), *25.II.–1.IV.43* (cited hereafter as *Div von Manteuffel, KTB 2, Anlagenheft III*). (3) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB IV,* 23–25 Feb 43. (4) MS # T–3 (Nehring *et al.*), Vol. 3a, Pt. II, Ch. III.

Tabarka–Mateur road at Sedjenane gap. Two French battalions of the Corps Franc d'Afrique (CFA) protected that trail and elements of the British 139th Brigade, the road junction. Between the enemy's impregnable position west of Djefna and El Aouana, other elements of the 139th Brigade had taken position. One reinforced battalion was astride the road, about two miles east of El Aouana. A smaller infantry force was near the station and a battalion of infantry was in reserve, near Sedjenane. In support was one regiment of field artillery. The road and railroad ran in close proximity through the same valleys.

At 0630, 26 February, the enemy opened his attack. Three groups of *Division von Manteuffel* were committed on the north flank. The *10th Bersaglieri Regiment* nearest the coast attacked toward Cap Serrat. The unit which had pushed eastward along the road as far as Djebel Abiod in November, the *11th Parachute Engineer Battalion* (Witzig), advanced north of the road in order to envelop the French and British at Sedjenane and attack them from the rear in conjunction with elements of *Regiment Barenthin* which pushed ahead south of the road. If the operation at Sedjenane proceeded successfully, the next objective for *Regiment Barenthin* would be occupation of Djebel Tabouna (564), southeast of it, from which a considerable adjacent area could be brought under observation. Major Witzig's battalion hit the French troops hard and cut the connection to Cap Serrat but was stopped about two miles north of Sedjenane. The British held on to the El Aouana position against light attack for more than a day, but, to avoid being cut off there by the enemy success at Sedjenane, pulled back and on 4 March also lost Sedjenane itself. The radar station had been evacuated on the previous day. The Germans easily occupied Djebel Tabouna. General von Arnim, despite an interest in the operations which brought him during the first days to the forward command post of *Division von Manteuffel* west of Sedjenane, could not provide the means to exploit the initial success.

For a while the Allies maintained a determined defense of Tamera with reinforcements including the 1st Parachute Brigade, although on 10 March the enemy occupied an adjacent height (Djebel Bel Harch, 419) and went on to capture Tamera. Through rugged terrain, von Manteuffel's forces advanced to within two and a half miles of Djebel Abiod and by 19 March had fulfilled their mission. But they were too weakened to continue the drive. Thereafter the situation once again became stabilized and was to remain so until one side or the other could commit enough strength to seize a substantial advantage. Djebel Abiod was thus kept under a steady threat. When this phase of the *Fifth Panzer Army* attack had come to an end, Kesselring reported that 1,600 Allied prisoners, 17 guns, 16 tanks, 13 antitank guns, and 70 vehicles had been taken or destroyed after three weeks of action on this part of the front.[7]

The Attack Via Sidi Nsir

The main attack against the British 46th Division on 26 February came in the sector of the 128th Infantry Brigade (Brigadier M. A. James) along the road from Mateur

[7] (1) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (2) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB IV,* 26–28 Feb 43, and *KTB V,* 1–19 Mar 43. (3) Rpt, *Comando Supremo Nr. 1112/43 to OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt,* 19 Mar 43, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt, Meldungen des Ob Sued, 1.III.–30.IV.43, Band I.* (4) MS # T–3 (Nehring *et al.*), Vol. 3a.

to Bédja through Sidi Nsir. Here was the area in which the U.S. 1st and 34th Divisions would be engaged during the final attack two months later, and here was the route which the 1st Battalion, U.S. 1st Armored Regiment, as part of Blade Force, had used on 24 November as it rolled eastward toward Chouïgui pass, Tebourba, and Djedeïda. Sidi Nsir is a small agricultural village nestled in the valley of the Bou Oissa river at the junction of a secondary road to Tunis and the railroad to Mateur. The railroad continues northeast along the gentler grades and twisting course of the Bou Oissa and the Djoumine rivers. The highway climbs almost due eastward over heights which separate Sidi Nsir from the broad Tine river valley. Among the many grass-green and gray limestone hills, Djebel Tahent (609) is most prominent. Over two miles northeast of Sidi Nsir it rises to a broad crest from which Mateur itself is readily seen, and movement over a wide area can be easily observed. A British artillery unit had an observation post on Hill 609 during the days before the attack but it was an air reconnaissance which discovered, late on 25 February, that enemy troop carriers and tanks were moving on Sidi Nsir from the east. The position at Sidi Nsir was held by one battalion of infantry and one battery of artillery simply as a forward patrol base. The main line of defense was halfway to Bédja at a long defile, east of Ksar Mezouar, which the British had in November renamed "Hunt's Gap."

Von Arnim committed *Kampfgruppe Lang* at Sidi Nsir with the mission of taking the village and capturing a road junction ten miles beyond it on the way to Bédja. Colonel Lang's armored force consisted of *Group Lueder* (*501st Heavy Panzer Battalion,* armed with Tiger tanks, the *2d Battalion, 7th Panzer Regiment,* an armored infantry and a reconnaissance battalion). A second force, *Kampfgruppe Eder* (*755th Grenadier Regiment,* reinforced, from the *334th Infantry Division*), had orders to attack farther south over Djebel el Ang and through Toukabeur and take the heights northeast of Oued Zarga, thus cutting the main road to Medjez el Bab. The *47th Grenadier Regiment* was initially held in reserve and later assigned to Lang.[8]

The Germans opened the attack with heavy mortar fire on Hill 609, and enemy infantry took it about 1000, 26 February. A delaying battle near Sidi Nsir then ensued. The enemy worked along the hills on the northwest and southeast of Sidi Nsir until his fire enfiladed the defenders from both flanks. He then made a frontal assault with tanks, led by a Tiger. By 1800, the main British position had been overrun, and shortly afterward, the British abandoned Sidi Nsir. During the night scattered groups began working their way back to the main force at Hunt's Gap through soaking rain.

The day's respite was invaluable in allowing time for reinforcements to start toward the 128th Brigade there, reinforcements which enabled the brigade to meet the enemy next day in sufficient strength to keep him from reaching Bédja. Sections of *Kampfgruppe Lang* advanced along the road into the defile at Ksar Mezouar, the tanks in platoons of four interspersed with truck-borne infantry and armored cars. Although expert marksmanship knocked out some of the British guns before they could fire, the attacking force entered what amounted to an ambush. The defenders were well emplaced along a main line on

[8] See n. 6 (1) above.

commanding ground, with five batteries of field artillery, one battery of antitank guns, and excellent observation. Royal Air Force bombers assisted in halting the enemy armored column on the road, while the guns knocked out tank after tank. The leading section could not turn around, could not leave the road, could not back out. Some of the vehicles, abandoned during what appeared to be a panic, were demolished by British engineers after dark. At least eleven were never recovered by the foe.

Colonel Lang attributed the failure of the attack to the fact that an infantry battalion sent by a circuitous route through the mountains to envelop the British blocking position got lost and did not complete its assigned mission.[9] For the next four days, the battle continued in the vicinity of Ksar Mezouar before the enemy settled down to develop defensive positions in the hills.

The northern wing of the British 78th Division (General Evelegh) in the area north and west of Medjez el Bab was not seriously involved until 28 February. On that day elements of the *755th Grenadier Regiment* (*Group Eder*) pushed along Djebel el Ang to attack Toukabeur. They struck two battalions of the French 3d Algerian Infantry under Evelegh, on the djebel and south of it near the village of Chaouach. The 1st Battalion fell back next day on Chaouach. Both battalions had suffered severe losses and were withdrawn to Teboursouk during the night of 1–2 March. The enemy on the opposite side of the river closed in on Medjez el Bab as far as Grich el Oued, but did not accept the hazards of exposure closer to its strong artillery defenses. On 2 March, the enemy broke off action near Medjez el Bab. Two days later the German forces went over to the defensive between the Medjerda river and the Sidi Nsir sector. The enemy now occupied the high ground from Toukabeur to Ksar Mezouar, then north and northwest to Tamera.[10]

[9] MS # D–173 (Lang).

The Enemy Fails, South of the Medjerda

General Weber's attack south of the Medjerda river had been less successful and more costly. The assault was executed by *Group Schmid.* It had two objectives. One attack, made by the *1st Battalion, 69th Panzer Grenadiers,* reinforced by artillery and the only company of tanks in this sector, and directed across the hills toward Slourhia, was part of the attempted encirclement of Medjez el Bab. The second and more complicated enemy effort was an attempt to envelop Bou Arada by co-ordinating his attacks through the hills on either side of the Bou Arada valley (Djebel Rihane, 720, and Djebel Mansour, 678) with an armored drive aimed at Sidi Mahmoud gap (seven miles north of Djebel Rihane). The two prongs of the attack were to meet at El Aroussa on the Siliana river. The northern force was *Group Koch* (*Parachute Regiment, Hermann Goering Division* [–]) and to the south was *Group Holzinger* (*756th Mountain Regiment,* reinforced, from the *334th Infantry Division*).

The British 11th Infantry Brigade (78th Division) bore the brunt of the thrust aimed at Slourhia while elements of the 38th Brigade (reinforced) of the British Y Division opposed *Group Koch's* attack toward Djebel

[10] (1) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (2) XIX Corps Jnl, 28 Feb–1 Mar 43. (3) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB IV* and *V,* 26 Feb–4 Mar 43.

Rihane, Testour, and El Aroussa.[11] The attack of the *756th Mountain Regiment (Group Holzinger)*, launched from the heights of Djebel Mansour, with El Aroussa as the ultimate objective, was met by the British 1st Parachute Brigade, also under command of Y Division. The first day's action went to the enemy, but on the second, the Allies stood their ground, and on 28 February counterattacked with the aid of reinforcements. By the end of the day they had restored the position north of Bou Arada. The enemy's attack, executed with insufficient strength and led by inexperienced officers, failed almost at once and at a high price in casualties and irreplaceable matériel. Von Arnim now withdrew the mountain regiment and shifted it to Colonel Lang's sector northwest of Medjez el Bab as the action south of the Medjerda faded out and the front was again stabilized along the original lines.[12]

The Outcome of the 26 February Offensive

On 3 March, when it had become evident that the Axis offensive had not fulfilled the hopes of its originators, *Fifth Panzer Army* summed up its gains and losses. Von Arnim claimed the capture of 2,500 Allied prisoners and the destruction or capture of 16 tanks, 20 guns, 17 antitank guns, 7 planes, and other matériel. At the same time, his forces had suffered over 1,000 casualties and the total loss of 22 tanks.[13] But this report does not give the whole picture. In addition to the 22 enemy tanks which were destroyed, another 49 were disabled, leaving General Weber with only 6 operational tanks on 1 March. This was the reason why the Axis attack in the main effort sector had to be suspended. Reluctantly, the Germans had to admit on the same day that their losses were higher than those inflicted upon the Allies.[14] These tank losses, amounting to almost 90 percent, could hardly be expected to escape Rommel's scrutiny. In his opinion the armor had been committed in violation of sound tactical principles.[15]

Von Arnim paid the price for a poorly timed and hastily prepared operation. He had sent his tanks into mountainous terrain where they were trapped and knocked out without the possibility of maneuvering. The bulk of the infantry had been wasted in the open tank country of the Bou Arada valley. But above all, the effort had come too late. It might have succeeded if co-ordinated with Rommel's drive on Thala. But it was not. Nevertheless, the Axis offensive which began on 26 February in northern Tunisia, though it fell short of complete success at every point, yielded some important results. The enemy had been stopped on the northern road near Tamera, but was in a fairly strong position for a later attempt to reach Djebel Abiod. He was not in possession of the Bédja–Djebel Abiod switch line, to be sure, but, farther to the southeast, he

[11] Y Division was a provisional unit organized on 16 February 1943. Its commander was the artillery officer, 6th Armoured Division. It held the southern flank of the British 5 Corps sector while General Keightley's headquarters controlled armored forces during the withdrawal to the Grand Dorsal and the defense of Sbiba and Thala. Major units of Y Division were the 1st Parachute Brigade, 38th Brigade, and elements of the 17/21 Lancers.

[12] (1) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB IV* and *V*, 26 Feb–2 Mar 43. (2) MS # T–3 (Nehring *et al.*), Vol. 3a, Pt. II, Ch. III. (3) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[13] *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB V*, 3 Mar 43.

[14] (1) Rad, Lang to Weber, 0935, 1 Mar 43, in *334th Inf Div, KTB 1, Anlagenband IV*. (2) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB V*, 1 Mar 43.

[15] Conf, von Arnim with Gause, Chief of Staff, *Army Group Africa*, at Sfax, 6 Mar 43, in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB V*, 6 Mar 43.

held the dominating heights above the Medjez el Bab–Oued Zarga road and kept Medjez el Bab under constant threat. He would have to be driven out of those hills before the drive on Tunis could be renewed. While making this gain in northern Tunisia, the enemy had also been preparing for an Allied attack on the Mareth Position and had adopted measures intended to meet Allied strategy.

To meet the Axis threat the British, by 7 March, had executed numerous shifts of their forces. The 36th Brigade was withdrawn from the northern wing of the French XIX Corps and inserted opposite Toukabeur to reinforce left of the 138th Brigade. The 1st Parachute Brigade was relieved by the 26th Regimental Combat Team, U.S. 1st Infantry Division, south of Bou Arada, and was moved north to the Tamera position in support of the hard-pressed 139th Brigade. The main body of the 1st Guards Brigade (Brigadier F. A. V. Copland-Griffiths), which was still in the Kasserine area when von Arnim launched his attack, arrived in El Aroussa on 27 February to relieve the pressure on that town and Testour. When the danger in this sector had abated, the brigade, on 3 March, moved to the area of Bédja and came under the control of the British 46th Division. Three days later the 1st Guards Brigade was committed at Munchar eight miles east of Bédja. By then the enemy's attacks had ceased.[16]

American forces had participated only briefly and on the outer fringe of these operations. On 5 March a task force from the U.S. 34th Infantry Division under Col. Robert W. Ward, commanding officer, 135th Infantry, made a demonstration toward Pichon. Starting from Sbiba and advancing via El Ala the task force made contact with the enemy early in the afternoon. The engagement took place along the road leading from El Ala to Pichon and Fondouk el Aouareb in the area just north of Djebel Trozza (997). The Americans discovered that the Germans were dug in along a well prepared defense line. At 1700 Colonel Ward received orders to withdraw. Hampered by rain and "ice-slick" muddy roads, the task force returned to its original position near Sbiba via a circuitous route that took elements of the command through the enemy outpost line. Casualties had been few.[17]

During the entire period of the enemy's 26 February offensive, the Allied air effort in northern Tunisia had been more active and more effective than ever before.[18]

New Instructions for Army Group Africa

Rommel was to retain command of *Army Group Africa* for only a short time. But before he withdrew he forced another review of Axis strategic intentions. He thus instigated the issuance on 8 March, the day before his retirement on sick leave, of a new directive for operations in Tunisia.

On 24 February, shortly after assuming command of the army group, Rommel had called on his two army commanders for estimates of the situation confronting their forces. General von Arnim pointed out that the position of the two Axis armies was such

[16] Info supplied by the Cabinet Office, London.

[17] (1) RAF Middle East Review 2, p. 35. AAF Archives. (2) The German troops holding this sector were part of *Group Fullriede,* a provisional unit, which had replaced the *47th Grenadier Regiment* when the latter was pulled out and moved north in support of von Arnim's offensive of 26 February. The Germans claimed to have destroyed two American tanks and several vehicles. See *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB V,* 5 Mar. 43.

[18] RAF Middle East Review 2, p. 35. AAF Archives.

as to expose them to the danger of being separated and defeated if the Allies delivered heavy simultaneous attacks on them from Algeria and Libya. But he did not believe that the Allies needed to launch large offensives to achieve their purpose. He stated that if he were in General Eisenhower's place he would concentrate on using all the means at his disposal to cut the supply lines and destroy the ports and air forces of the Axis. If this effort succeeded, the Axis positions in North Africa would fall before July without the possibility of being seriously contested. Any lengthy defenses of them would be possible only if one or the other of the Allied forces were hit hard enough to put it out of action for at least six months. This accomplished, all available Axis forces could be concentrated in an attack on the other front. Less sweeping successes, achieved by Axis sallies from their well-fortified line, could only put off the inevitable decision.

General von Arnim estimated the total Axis strength as 350,000, of which 120,000 were fighting troops. Germans constituted two thirds of these combat troops and one third of the auxiliary forces. The combat elements were so badly strung out along the extended front as to average one company and two guns to each two and one-half miles. The front should, he declared, be shortened to prevent the Allies from separating the two Axis armies. The Axis supply line by sea should also be improved and secured. The current volume of supplies reaching Tunisia barely sufficed for current operations. For the all-out offensives that he favored von Arnim estimated that a supply backlog of at least one month was necessary. He calculated that at least 140,000 tons a month would be needed to stockpile the matérial required to meet a large-scale Allied attack. General Messe, in his report, lamented the Allied air superiority in his area, the shortage of men and matériel, and the lack of unity in newly assembled units. He believed it probable that the Allies would launch simultaneous attacks on his position from the southwest, southeast, and the west or northwest. Believing his forces incapable of beating off such a co-ordinated attack, he recommended preparations to withdraw from the Mareth Position after merely a preliminary battle there rather than remaining until his army became inextricably engaged.

Rommel on 1 March presented a memorandum to Kesselring which raised the issues squarely. He outlined the situation as he saw it: a front of 387 miles, of which 341 were very weakly held, with many vulnerable points and the main defensive effort concentrated to the west and southwest of Tunis and in the Mareth Position; the Allies with 50,000 British, 40,000 American, and 40,000 French troops along the *Fifth Panzer Army's* front, armed with 366 tanks, 440 guns, and 600 antitank guns, and eventually to be reinforced by the 2d Armored Division (U.S.) with 390 tanks; while across from the *First Italian Army's* front were the estimated 80,000 troops, 900 tanks, 400 guns, and 550 antitank guns of the British Eighth Army. Such strength would permit the Allies by co-ordinated and simultaneous action to pierce the Axis line at any selected point. The Axis forces must deliver continuous spoiling attacks to delay a major Allied offiensive as long as possible. Once the Allies were able to mount such an offensive, the weakness of the Axis defenses would make its containment impossible. To achieve a proper degree of strength and depth in defense, the Axis could shorten its line from 387 to 93 miles, by combining the

two Axis armies in the area northeast of the current *Fifth Panzer Army*'s front as far south as Djebel Mansour and thence over the mountains eastward to Enfidaville, at the same time expanding to the west to take in the ridges beyond Medjez el Bab and Bou Arada. (*See Map V.*) If such a withdrawal meant that the two Allied armies would be able to establish direct contact, and that airfields would have to be abandoned to them, it also meant that such disadvantages would be offset by a line which could be held for a long time rather than only while awaiting a concentrated Allied attack. It promised to forestall an Allied attempt to separate the two armies and overwhelm them individually. He again called attention to the critically deficient rate of supply. Only if it could be raised to 140,000 tons per month could the Axis accumulate the means of withstanding a large-scale attack and engaging thereafter in offensive operations. In view of the current situation and the Allied operations expected to begin within the month, Rommel asked what specifically were the high command's long-range plans for the campaign in Tunisia.[19]

The issues before the Axis leaders were clear. Should the Mareth Position on which so much reliance had been placed be abandoned, or should it be defended to the utmost? Should the two armies be brought into a narrower area in order to thicken the defense of the front? Could lagging logistical support be expedited?

On 3 March Kesselring transmitted the views of Rommel to the OKW with his own comments, which emphasized a point of view natural to an Air Force officer. While admitting that the situation called for a shortening of the front, he insisted that the airfields which would be given up were essential to strong defense. To forfeit them would defeat the very purpose of shortening the line. They should be given up only when the situation became desperate and he did not regard it as such. His proposal was that the current respite from an Allied offensive should be prolonged by a series of attacks in north and central Tunisia, to be made by armored and mobile units. If the planned strike of the *First Italian Army* from the Mareth Position against Montgomery succeeded, several weeks would be won there. The time thus gained could be used to strengthen rear positions and to expand the volume of supply and reinforcement to the extent necessary to bring the armored units up to full strength for offensive operations. If the strike failed both the Mareth and Chott Positions must be organized for defense in depth. Summing up, Kesselring took the position that to contract the area held by the two Axis armies would increase the chance of losing Tunisia. He believed that by utilizing fully their advantage of interior lines and holding the Allies off with strikes by reinforced mobile units over a large area, they could gain ground and eventually secure the Axis bridgehead.

Hitler was not pleased with the views of his field commanders. After all the urging earlier by Rommel and others that the Tunisian problem could be solved if the southern army were pulled back into the Mareth Position, he found it surprising that, once there, this army should have to be

[19] Rpt, Commanding General, *Army Group Africa, Nr. 45/43,* to *OB SOUTH,* 1 Mar 43, EAP–21–x–14/16. Attached to it are estimates of the situation by Generals von Arnim and Messe, each dated 26 February 1943.

brought still further north.[20] To withdraw the two armies into a limited bridgehead would clearly signify the beginning of the end. Concentrated spoiling attacks with limited objectives must be undertaken, but success could not be achieved by un-coordinated attacks carried out by each army separately, with insufficient means. Hitler refused to accept the length of the present front or the inadequate number of small cargo craft as justifying the failure of the Axis line of supply. He instructed Jodl to remind Kesselring that he had promised a solution of the supply problem as early as the end of 1942. He endorsed Kesselring's program for limited attacks but with the injunction, fantastically optimistic, that the rate of supply would have to be doubled and later tripled.[21]

The somewhat flurried re-examination of Axis capabilities in Tunisia which Field Marshal Rommel had provoked ended on 8 March with a directive from *Comando Supremo* which conformed with Hitler's views. The Commander of *Army Group Africa* was directed to defend the Mareth Position, to proceed immediately with the preparation of the Chott Position for defense in depth, and to engage in aggressive spoiling attacks on the Allied positions. These instructions were accompanied with the information that *Comando Supremo* would make the utmost efforts to raise the rate of supply to 120,000 tons monthly.[22]

[20] Rommel had actually urged a withdrawal to the Chott Position north of Gabès and not to the Mareth Position.

[21] (1) *OKW/WFSt, KTB,* 3–9 Mar 43.

[22] Kesselring had told *Comando Supremo* that one third of this amount would represent an allowance for expected losses, i. e., that 80,000 tons would probably be the amount delivered. (1) *OKW/WFSt, KTB,* 9 Mar 43. (2) MS # C–065a (Greiner), 6 Mar 43.

Axis Logistical Preparations

The prospect of imminent Allied attack invited urgent preparatory action by both Axis powers, and subjected to new stresses and strains the somewhat hypothetical Italian control over Axis operations in the Mediterranean theater. Marshal Kesselring returned from an inspection trip to Tunisia on 10–11 March to report somewhat hopefully to OKW the condition of the defenses, despite ammunition shortages, and the low morale of General Messe's troops. The Mareth attack, he told Mussolini on 11 March, could be expected between 15 and 20 March. The dispositions were, he thought, well adapted to meet the attack; successful defense depended principally upon overcoming the scarcities of ammunition and fuel. Both the Duce and Kesselring saw the main threat in a possible Allied thrust toward Gabès. Gafsa seemed to be in no danger, despite the assembly of what he called another American army in the Tébessa area, for the approaches were heavily mined and the garrison was strong. In the north, *Fifth Panzer Army* was about to break off its attack near Djebel Abiod and would either attack Medjez el Bab or set up a reserve made up of the troops which were withdrawn plus the expected reinforcements from Sicily.[23] Thus the situation in Tunisia permitted hope that the whole Gabès position would be successfully defended provided that the supply problem was solved.

The Chief of Supplies and Transportation of *Army Group Africa,* Colonel Heigl, computed the monthly minimum requirement in supplies at 69,000 tons for all pur-

[23] (1) Mins of conversation, 11 Mar 43, Italian Collection, Item 26. (2) *OKW/WFSt, KTB,* 11 Mar 43.

poses including civilian needs. With an added 25 percent for losses, the total for all kinds became 86,000 tons. At the same time, about 3,000 motor vehicles could be shipped. At the beginning of February, *Comando Supremo*'s chief transportation officer had calculated that he would be able to transfer from 70,000 to 82,000 tons, which, if subject to the 25-percent-loss rate, would fall below the indispensable minimum. Actually, the total achieved was much lower, so that in both January and February it was possible only to provision the troops and to replace expended matériel. No accumulation against future demands was possible. Field Marshal Kesselring promised approximately 50,000 tons for the first fortnight of March, an assurance which, if fulfilled, would increase the resources available but would still be at a rate far below the 140,000 tons per month recommended to Field Marshal Rommel by General von Arnim (before the latter succeeded to the command of *Army Group Africa*) or the 120,000 tons recommended by Kesselring to Ambrosio on 7 March.[24]

The attempt to transport 60,000 tons of matériel in the first two weeks of March fell far short of success. Kesselring estimated the amount convoyed during the first eleven days at 10,000 tons, with about 19,000 tons en route and 3,500 scheduled to leave port on 14 March. Thus the crisis in fuel and ammunition would persist. About 20,000 men were waiting to be transported. To cope with the emergency, Kesselring proposed that captured French destroyers being refitted should be temporarily shifted to the transport of troops, and that, in general, the men be taken on destroyers, the medium and heavy weapons by air, and supplies and vehicles by steamships. He emphasized, however, that every makeshift which could expedite the transfer of needed men and matériel should also be employed. He urged, for example, that the prohibition on transporting fuel and munitions in the same vessel be temporarily lifted, that slower ships be escorted by German motorcraft carrying antiaircraft guns for protection against Allied torpedo bombers, and that the decks of all escort craft be fully used for cargo. When one of the ships of a convoy, a ship carrying fuel and ammunition, failed to get through on 12 March, he had all the small craft which had been loaded for the crossing that night reloaded and sent with gasoline and munitions only. He also induced the Italian authorities to comb the upper Adriatic for seaworthy motor lighters not in use and to consider diverting to Tunisia those normally used in the Strait of Messina or for transport to Pantelleria. On 13 March shortly before leaving for a conference with Hitler and Doenitz on the ways and means to increase the shipment of supplies to North Africa, Kesselring saw Mussolini. Mussolini informed Kesselring that he had recently written Hitler a letter regarding the Mediterranean situation and had proposed a conference with him in late March or early April on these matters. He agreed with Hitler's appraisal of the Tunisian situation and he stressed again the need for more Axis air support.[25]

Hitler's reaction to the situation in a con-

[24] (1) *Army Group Africa, O Qn,* Supply and Adm, Estimate of the Supply Situation, 4 Mar 43, by Col Heigl, in EAP 21-a-14/7. (2) Conf, Kesselring and Ambrosio, 7 Mar 43, in Italian Collection, Item 26. (3) Axis supplies reaching Tunisia in January were 46,069 tons, in February, 32,967 tons. Ship losses came to 21 in January and 15, plus 12 ferries, in February. (See Appendix B.)

[25] (1) *OKW/WFSt, KTB,* 14 Mar 43. (2) Conf, Mussolini and Kesselring, 13 Mar 43, in Italian Collection, Item 26.

ference on 14 March with Doenitz, Keitel, Kesselring, and Jodl was to reiterate the strategic importance of Tunis for the Axis and to point out that the Allies would gain four to five million tons of shipping space monthly if Tunisia fell. Retention of Tunisia was a question of supply, not of 80,000 tons as proposed by the Italians but rather of 150,000 to 200,000 tons. It was impossible to supply armies by air. The necessary supplies could only be brought in by sea. The need for ships was unlimited. To master this problem, organizing ability was needed and this only the German Navy could supply. The Italians would have to be confronted cold-bloodedly with the alternative of making an all-out effort to get supplies to North Africa or of losing Tunisia and with it Italy.

Admiral Doenitz, after meeting some opposition from Italian naval authorities, was supported by Mussolini and arranged for German-Italian naval collaboration on a much extended scale in conformity with the terms of a formal written agreement signed on 17 March. The *German Admiral, Rome* (Vice Admiral Friedrich Ruge), who had previously been the commander of convoy protection in northwestern waters, would pass, with his staff, under control of the Italian Naval Commander in Chief, Admiral Riccardi, and be integrated into *Supermarina* to help insure the flow of supplies. Germans were to be much more extensively used in Italian naval headquarters in the main ports, on the ships, and at antiaircraft training stations. Captured French war ships were to be operated by Germans, while in mixed German-Italian convoys, command would go with seniority. The Italians undertook to draw on their merchant and fishing fleets for small craft for antisubmarine operations with either Italian or German crews. German position-finding and mine-detecting apparatus would be sent to Italy for operation by German instructors with Italian personnel. Such measures, if energetically carried out, could not fail to improve the Axis logistical situation in the Mediterranean, but to achieve a doubling and tripling of tonnages delivered in Tunisia, the changes would have to be prodigious. Theses contemplated arrangements could hardly be so regarded.[26]

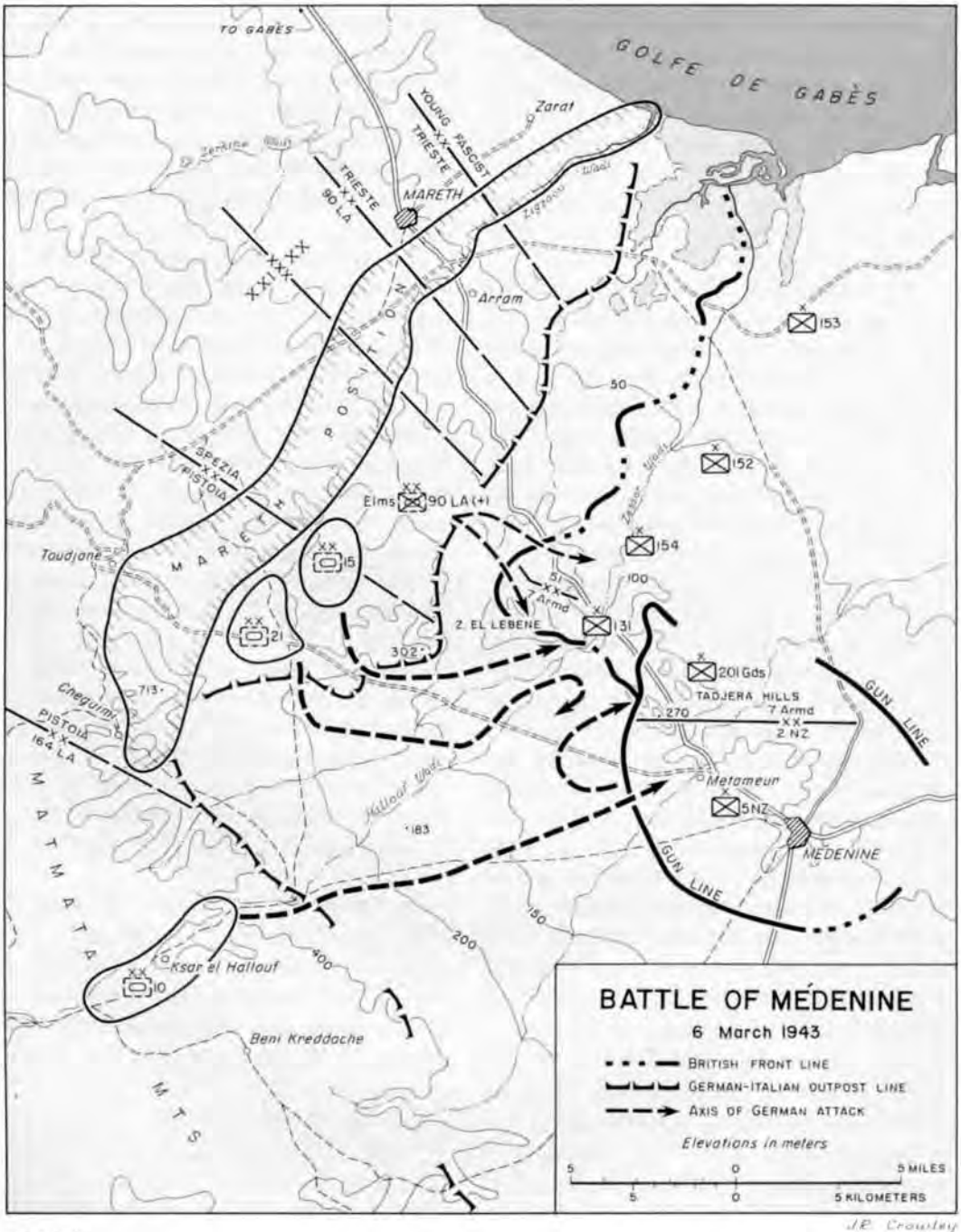
The Battle of Médenine

Field Marshal Rommel was eager to strike the British Eighth Army before it had assembled in full force near the Mareth Position. He fought his last battle in Tunisia northwest of Médenine on 6 March. (*Map 15*)

Rommel's troops were opposed by Lt. Gen. Sir Oliver Leese's British 30 Corps. On 26 February, General Montgomery had estimated that 30 Corps would be ready for an enemy attack by 7 March, and that Lt. Gen. Sir Brian Horrocks' 10 Corps, which was still east of Tripoli, would be in Tunisia, prepared to attack from forward positions with air support on 19 March. Montgomery was already planning his attack on the Mareth Position as a prelude to the seizure of Sfax, and expected to make the main effort next to the seacoast.

It was apparent at Médenine that the enemy would attack before 7 March and, on the eve of the assault, that it would be delivered on the morning of 6 March. Surprise had been lost. The situation of General Leese's corps had by then improved on General Montgomery's estimate of 26 February. General Leese had the following strength

[26] *OKW/WFSt, KTB,* 18 Mar 43.


TO GABÈS
GOLFE DE GABÈS
Zarat
YOUNG FASCIST
TRIESTE
XXX
MARETH
TRIESTE
90 LA
Zigzaou Wadi
Arram
153
50
152
Elms
90 LA (+)
154
100
51
XX
7 Armd
2. EL LEBENE
131
201 Gds
TADJERA HILLS
270
7 Armd
XX
2 NZ
GUN LINE
Metameur
5 NZ
MEDENINE
GUN LINE
150
200
400
Ksar el Hallouf
10
Beni Kreddache
MTS
MATMATA
Hallouf Wadi
183
713
Chegruma
PISTOIA
164 LA
SPEZIA
PISTOIA
MARETH LINE
Taudjane
15
21
302
BATTLE OF MÉDENINE
6 March 1943
BRITISH FRONT LINE
GERMAN-ITALIAN OUTPOST LINE
AXIS OF GERMAN ATTACK
Elevations in meters
5 0 5 MILES
5 0 5 KILOMETERS
J.E. Crowley

MAP 15

at his disposal for a thirty-mile front: three seasoned divisions, with lesser units equal to a fourth; 300 tanks, 350 guns, and 467 antitank guns; two forward airfields in use by three fighter wings, with double the air strength expected of the Axis forces; and a pattern of control by which to bring this very considerable power into play with maximum effectiveness.[27]

The British zone of defense around the northern and western approaches to Médenine curved like a fine fishing rod at the dramatic moment when, the tip drawn tautly down, the catch is about to be netted. The British 51st Division (with 153d, 152d and 154th Brigades in the front line) held a sector about fourteen miles wide from the coast to the Médenine–Mareth highway. To the left was the 7th Armoured Division (with 131st and 201st Guards Brigades in the front line). Its zone extended from a point two miles north of the Zemlet el Lebene hills to the dominating point 270 of the Tadjera Kbir heights. On the southwestern end of the British defense line was the 2d New Zealand Division guarding the approaches to Metameur and Médenine with the 5th New Zealand Brigade in the front. Men and guns were well dug in. Antitank guns were part of an organized belt of antitank defenses covering almost every possible approach, and sited in depth. Field artillery was not used in an antitank role but brought under centralized control for massed fires on prearranged squares in response to observers' calls. Tanks were dispersed behind the infantry lines, ready to move to prearranged assembly areas for counterattack missions. The airfields had ample antiaircraft protection and were organized to meet an armored attack as well. High ground was strongly held. No doubt the defenses of Médenine could have been improved in detail with more time, but they were formidable on the morning of 6 March. Furthermore, they had apparently been brought to their condition of strength without enemy recognition of what had been done.

The *German Africa Corps* (DAK) of which Generaleutnant Hans Cramer took command on 5 March, prepared the plan of attack against Médenine.[28] It provided for committing the *10th Panzer, 15th Panzer,* and *21st Panzer Divisions* and elements of the *90th Light African* and Italian *Spezia Divisions* in co-ordinated blows from the northwest, west, and southwest, using 160 tanks, 200 guns, and 10,000 infantry. The attack was to be launched from the Mareth defense zone and its extension on the south. The Axis line was held by the *Young Fascist, Trieste, 90th Light Africa, La Spezia, Pistoia,* and *164th Light Africa Divisions,* strung out in that order from the coast to the mountains south of Ksar el Hallouf. The enemy hoped with the benefit of surprise to take the British forces on the southwestern flank, cut through and divide them, and by envelopment to dispose of the bulk of them.

But the British on March 4 observed the *10th Panzer Division*'s southward movement from Gabès through Matmata towards Ksar el Hallouf. They reported a total of sixty tanks plus very heavy antiaircraft armament. Farther west, they also spotted

[27] Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[28] (1) Opn *CAPRI,* dtd 3 Mar 43, copy in *15th Panzer Div, KTB Nr. 7, 26.XII.42–11.XIII.43, Anlage 178.* (2) General Cramer had come from OKH to Rommel's army on 22 January as *Acting Commander, Corps for Special Employment,* and became *Acting Commander, DAK,* on 13 February 1943. He commanded the corps until he was captured on 1 May 1943.

what was believed to be another approaching armored division. The Eighth Army, uncertain only whether the main thrust would be from the southwest or from the north, watched on 5 March for the appearance of the third enemy armored division. While the enemy withheld his attack for another day, the British perfected their well-concealed firing positions. Advance Headquarters, 30 Corps, waited expectantly at Ben Gardane.[29]

The main highway from Mareth to Médenine runs south-southeast over open plain for about twenty-four miles. The Matmata mountain chain west of it curves toward the highway at a distance narrowing from ten miles at the south to five miles at the north. From the mid-point of this chain, a spur ridge cut by several passes projects eastward almost to the highway. The spur, incorporated in the forefield of the Mareth fortifications, offered cover behind which an attacking force could assemble. Rommel planned to send two of his armored divisions through the passes of this spur while a third rode along the western side of the main mountain chain and cut east through it at Hallouf pass to reach the plain. This division would form the southern wing of the attacking force. The attack would then move northeastward to the initial objective, the Tadjera hills, rising on the far side of the main highway. Elements of the *90th Light Africa* and *Spezia Divisions* would attack on the north and the *10th Panzer Division* on the south; in the center would be the *15th Panzer* and *21st Panzer Divisions*. The Hallouf river would separate the two center divisions as they made their way along its banks to the gap between Zemlet el Lebene and the Tadjera hills just short of the Mareth–Médenine highway. On the northwestern side of this opening the Zemlet el Lebene was an early objective of the *15th Panzer Division*. On the southeastern side, two ridges of the Tadjera hills paralleling the highway which were believed to be occupied by British artillery, were the initial objective of the *21st Panzer Division*. The panzer division was to speed toward these ridges at first light and overrun opposing batteries without regard for losses. The *10th Panzer Division*'s objective was the dominant Hill 270 of Tadjera Kbir and the village of Metameur. *DAK* sent a reconnaissance force to Beni Kreddache and beyond to reconnoiter toward the highway leading south from Médenine. This force was to furnish flank protection.[30]

The attack opened at 0600, 6 March, after a rainy night. The use of smoke proved unnecessary since a heavy mist masked the exit of the armored divisions onto the plain. The enemy columns approached Médenine on separate converging trails. The fog rose slowly into an overcast which frustrated the plans for dive bombing and confined both Axis and Allied tactical air support to fighter bombers, in which the Allies had a considerable superiority.[31]

The *10th Panzer Division*'s advance group came in contact with the British outposts some four miles west of Metameur at about 0730, a fact which the Germans learned through intercepted British radioed reports. A few minutes later, the spearhead

[29] Eighth Army Intell Sums, 443, 28 Feb 43, and 447, 5 Mar 43. AFHQ AG 319.1, Micro Job 24, Reel 99D.

[30] Orders for Opn *CAPRI*—(1) *10th Panzer Div*, 5 Mar 43, in *10th Panzer Div, KTB, Anlagenband 6, 29.X.42–19.IV.43.* (2) *15th Panzer Div*, 4 Mar 43, in *15th Panzer Div, KTB 7, 26.XII.42–11.III.-43, Anlage 202.* (3) *21st Panzer Div*, 4 Mar 43, in *21st Panzer Div, KTB, Anlagenband 9, 8.I–31.III.-43.*

[31] Montgomery, *El Alamein to the Rio Sangro*, pp. 72–75.

of the *15th Panzer Division* on the north side of the Hallouf river came under fire from Zemlet el Lebene which obliged it to stop until its own supporting artillery could come forward. The drive of the armored group of *21st Panzer Division* south of the wadi was equally unsuccessful in reaching the Tadjera hills. The German armor was stopped two miles to the west of its objective, Hill 270. Soon the British guns in positions there and on the two Tadjeras, guns which had not been overrun by tanks, struck by bombs, or silenced by counterbattery fire, were saturating the areas occupied by the attacking troops and tanks with an extraordinary volume of adjusted fire. The Germans experienced unusual difficulty in identifying the exact sources of this shelling which pinned them down and compelled their vehicles to seek such cover as the shallow wadies and low hillocks afforded. By 1000, the attack in the center had been completely halted. A slight German penetration on Zemlet el Lebene was restored to British control by two troops of Sherman tanks. The attack of the *90th Light Africa Division* and elements of the Italian *Spezia Division* was driven back by counterattacks after initial success against the 154th Brigade on the left wing of the 51st Division sector. The original plan had thus utterly miscarried.

Plans to renew the offensive at noon by sending the *15th* and *21st Panzer Divisions* along both sides of the Hallouf river were frustrated by the latter's inability to reorganize in sufficient strength in time for such an offensive. At 1430, however, preceded by Axis dive bombing against the ridges and by artillery preparations, Rommel's tanks and infantry lunged forward again. The *21st Panzer Division* attempted to envelop the Tadjera Kbir (held by the 201st Guards Brigade) from the north with the tanks of the *5th Panzer Regiment* followed by the infantry of the *104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment*. Just as this venture began, the troop concentration area and the division command post came under such artillery fire that for half an hour the staff could not direct movement, and indeed had to withdraw to the west out of range. The tanks in this attack got separated from the infantry which was driven to the ground by a curtain of fire after an advance of but a few hundred yards. The *5th Panzer Regiment's* advance was thus stopped almost as soon as it had got under way. The regiment reported its strength reduced to thirty-five tanks fit for combat. New small gains by the *15th Panzer Division* against the 131st Infantry Brigade were wiped out before 2000 by a British counterattack. The drive in the center had again been stalled. The attack on the right never even got started.

Late in the day, the *10th Panzer Division* was erroneously reported to have entered Metameur and to have gained control of a section of the highway north of the village. Actually it had never got nearer than from one to two miles of its objective. Instead of pressing the costly direct assault in the center, the *German Africa Corps* now contemplated holding the ground thus far gained until darkness, then shifting the *21st Panzer Division* to the defensive while the *15th Panzer Division* slipped southward to join the *10th Panzer Division* in exploiting its supposed success on the flank. The German armored units pulled back to the mountains, after disengaging in the center with difficulty and with additional losses in tanks, and awaited orders to renew the attack next day in accordance with the revised plan. But the actual failure of the *10th Panzer*

Division as well as of the others, and the folly of further depleting the severely weakened armor against obviously stronger forces, compelled Rommel to abandon the attack. Rommel's last battle in Africa became a costly failure.[32] Here, as was to be the case at El Guettar a little later, German armor was stopped by resolute infantry, field artillery, and massed antitank defenses.

On 6 and 7 March the *German Africa Corps* lost 61 Germans killed, 388 wounded, and 32 missing, 33 Italians killed, 122 wounded, and 9 missing, and at least 41 tanks.[33] For the approaching battles General Cramer had only 85 German and 24 Italian tanks, and 3 Italian self-propelled assault guns ready for action.[34] For such expenditure, the *German Africa Corps* could claim ascertained British losses of 6 tanks, 16 scout cars, 33 motor vehicles, 32 antitank and antiaircraft guns, and 51 prisoners. The British had committed few of their tanks. They had won the victory over German armor by several hundred antitank and other guns well concealed, firmly protected, and fired with the benefit of good observation. They had been aided in their success by inefficient employment of the German and Italian strength. Indeed, the failure of the *15th Panzer Division* to expend more than a small percentage of its normal quota of small arms ammunition and mortar shells was condemned by the commander, who cited it as convincing evidence that his infantry had not fought aggressively. The loss of 24 of his tanks—11 Mark II (special), 9 Mark IV, and 4 Mark III (75-mm.)—could hardly have been consoling.[35]

Rommel Leaves Tunisia

Rommel's sick leave at Wiener-Neustadt, Austria, interrupted at the time of El 'Alamein and long overdue, took him from Tunisia on 9 March; he was never to return. He was succeeded on that day as commander of *Army Group Africa* by General von Arnim, who in turn yielded command of *Fifth Panzer Army* to General der Panzer Truppen Gustav von Vaerst. General Messe's command over *First Italian Army* remained nominal with respect to its German elements, once General Bayerlein took up his duties as the German Chief of Staff with that army. For some time, the German *10th Panzer* and *21st Panzer Divisions* were directly controlled by General von Arnim's headquarters as components of the *Army Group Africa* reserve. Only the *15th Panzer Division* at first went under Messe's command.

Field Marshal Rommel's departure from Tunisia was kept secret. He stopped briefly in Rome, then paid his respects to the Fuehrer at the latter's advanced headquarters at Winniza in the Ukraine on 10 March, and continued to Wiener-Neustadt. The revamping of the command structure

[32] (1) *15th Panzer Div, KTB 7,* 4–10 Mar 43, and Combat Rpt on Operation CAPRI, dated 7 Mar 43, *Anlage 192,* (2) *21st Panzer Div, KTB,* 4–8 Mar 43. (3) Maj. Gen. Sir Howard Kippenberger, *Infantry Brigadier* (London, 1949), pp. 270–75.

[33] Montgomery, *El Alamein to the Rio Sangro,* page 46, says that 52 tanks were left on the field, as current reports list 45 on the 7th Armoured Division front and 5 Mark III's and 2 others on the 2d New Zealand Division front.

[34] For the figures on German losses and remaining Axis armor, see Rpt, *Dtsch. Chef A. O. K. I, Anlagen 20 KTB, 8.III.–27.IV.43* (cited hereafter as *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB, Anlagen*).

[35] Div Order, *15th Panzer Div,* 10 Mar 43, in *15th Panzer Div, KTB 7, 26.XII.42–11.III.43, Anlage 202.*

in Tunisia and the forthcoming battle on the Mareth Line caused some echoes in his correspondence but he had learned from Hitler that he would not return, and he was now free of African matters. The Allies continued to believe that he was in Tunisia, and for weeks press reports nurtured the popular belief that *"Rommel's Africa Corps"* was the only fighting force in Tunisia. In this respect, the Allied public was scarcely less well informed then the Germans, who had to wait for the defeat in May to discover that the much-publicized German commander had not been leading Axis operations in Africa for the past two months.[36]

[36] (1) Louis P. Lochner, ed. and transl., *The Goebbels Diaries, 1942–1943* (New York, 1948), pp. 352, 369. (2) MS # C–065a (Greiner), 10 Mar 43. (3) Telgs, von Arnim to Rommel, 0345, 10 Mar, 1045, 10 Mar, 0455, 14 Mar, 1620, 13 Mar 43, and Ltr, Rommel to von Arnim, 12 Mar 43, in EAP 21–a–14/7.

CHAPTER XXVII

From Mareth to Enfidaville

The Approach of the British Eighth Army

The main operation undertaken in March by 18 Army Group, aided by Allied aviation, was to bring the British Eighth Army through the constricted passage along the coast in the vicinity of Gabès despite any resistance *Army Group Africa* could offer. The attempts to drive the German-Italian forces back from prepared defensive positions in this area were made almost wholly by troops of the British Empire and by associated units of other nationality under General Montgomery's command. American participation was limited to the air and to independent auxiliary operations by the ground forces of the U.S. II Corps. In Northwest Africa two coalitions tested each other's capacity in 1942–1943 to make maximum use of a combined total military potential. Although the Eighth Army's push from Mareth to Enfidaville was a British exploit within an Allied military endeavor, a general account of it is necessary here as background for the description of the concurrent operations by the U.S. II Corps which follows.[1]

[1] The information from Allied, British, German, and Italian sources used in constructing this general narrative may also contribute to a better understanding of the Eighth Army's role in the ultimate victory.

The main test of Allied strength and Axis power in March was the battle for the Mareth Position. The British First Army and the *Fifth Panzer Army* were contending, to be sure, at several points in northern Tunisia, where the aggressiveness of General von Arnim was unremitting, but the basic objective of each army there was simply to pin down opposing troops and to prevent their direct contribution to a victory or a defeat in southern Tunisia. It became the purpose of *Fifth Panzer Army* to free the defenders of the Mareth Position as much as possible from Allied pressure. The British First Army, for its part, aimed at holding in the north Axis men and matériel which could otherwise be sent to reinforce the *Italian First Army* at Mareth. During these preliminaries, the Eighth Army proceeded to the crucial battle with the majestic deliberation of a pachyderm. Its base was shifted westward to Tripoli, where harbor debris and port wreckage resulting from Allied bombing and Axis sabotage was expeditiously removed or repaired. In February Montgomery's troops accelerated their advance toward Mareth in order to afford relief to the U.S. II Corps beyond Kasserine pass by threatening Rommel's rear guard near Mareth. But with Rommel's with-

drawal the necessity for the action had actually passed before Eighth Army began pressing. Rommel did not withdraw in response to the Eighth Army's threat but in his eagerness to win an early, easy victory over only its advanced elements. British Eighth Army's preparations were thorough partly because of the methodical approach of its commander to any prospective battle and partly because the barrier at Mareth could be broken only by greatly superior strength, after which the enemy had to be pursued with celerity and ample resources.

Permission to pull his army westward into Tunisia, as stated earlier, had been granted to Rommel by *Comando Supremo* only when such a movement was recognized to be inevitable, and only on a schedule which would permit the completion in Tunisia of new defensive works. The retreat had been expedited in a manner which sorely tried the already shaken confidence of the Italians in Rommel. Although construction work on the defenses could no doubt have gone on indefinitely before those responsible for defending the position would have deemed it complete, the *German-Italian Panzer Army* arrived in the vicinity considerably ahead of the date thought appropriate by *Comando Supremo*. The necessary time still remained because General Montgomery believed that it would be sounder military practice to wait until he could attain full preparedness for the attack than to catch the enemy only partly ready for defense. By the time of the battle, the Axis forces had had about three months in which, with such scanty materials as could be procured, and using labor and replacement troops, to develop the defenses constituting the Mareth barrier.

The Mareth Position

The coastal corridor between Tripoli and Gabès across which the Mareth Line was established south of Gabès, becomes a narrowing bottleneck between the sea and a belt of severely eroded hills, averaging about 1,300 feet and rising to peaks of 2,200 feet, the Matmata chain. The coast line trends from southeast to northwest while the eastern front of the hill mass runs more nearly north and south. The corridor thus converges to make a gap of slightly more than twenty miles from Zarat, near the coast, through Mareth to Toudjane in the hills. (*Map IX*) The main road from Tripoli to Tunis passes through Ben Gardane near the Tunisian border, then on through Médenine and Mareth to Gabès. The narrow gap south of Mareth is traversed from southwest to northeast by stream beds, and punctuated by a few scattered low hills, such as the spur running east towards the Zemlet el Lebene which furnished cover for the German approach to Médenine on 5–6 March. Of the stream beds, the Zigzaou wadi is the most considerable, and along it, the French before the war constructed a Tunisian version of the Maginot Line. The resemblance was chiefly in the defensive concept which underlay both projects. For the Mareth Position had been erected to defend the colony from a possible attack by the Italians, and the works were rather primitive. Axis development of the position took account of the obsolescence of the concrete and steel pillboxes and shelters, and of the necessity for establishing defense in depth on the ground in front of the Zigzaou wadi rather than behind it. By the time the British Eighth Army arrived for its attack, the

Mareth defensive system had been made formidable although far from invulnerable.[2]

The Mareth Position extended for about twenty-five miles across the corridor southwesterly from the coast along the course of the Zigzaou wadi to high ground in the Matmata hills in the vicinity of Cheguimi south of Toudjane. The wadi was wide and fairly deep, with sheer banks; when the bottom was awash with the runoff of recent rains and the banks muddy from seasonal soakings, the ditch became difficult for tanks to cross and even more difficult for wheeled vehicles. At all times, wet or dry, it could be surmounted by the methods developed in modern warfare unless protected by fire of sufficient force and intensity, in which case it could be an effective element in a system of defense. The Zigzaou wadi was extended and supplemented by excavated tank ditches along which continuous mounds of soft earth and occasional concrete or masonry obstacles had been erected. A line of twenty-six fortified strongpoints stretched from the coast to the hills, thence south along the eastern front of the high mass, ending in a Y, with one prong jutting northwestward to Toudjane, and the other southward along the escarpment east of Cheguimi. Each strongpoint had several concrete dugouts, machine gun emplacements, or shelters, those in the plain being far less substantial than the newer ones in the hills. Two belts of mines had been laid around an irregular zone from four to six miles wide roughly paralleling the Zigzaou wadi on the side toward Médenine and enclosing the village of Arram. Within this advance sector, from the Djebel Saïkra (302) at the south, to the northwestern edge of some salt marshes near the ocean, the Axis command had placed artillery and machine guns behind bunkers and wire, and planned to hold off attackers at this point as long as possible. Artillery observation could be much better in this advanced area than in the main line near the coast.[3]

The Matmata hills form a belt generally less than ten miles wide but broadening to more than twenty miles west of Mareth, where they enclose an irregular plateau. The tracks through these hills at most points are unfit for wheeled transport. From the plain at Médenine, the roads to the west, such as that through Hallouf pass which the *10th Panzer Division* used in the 6 March attack, enter the chain through defiles which could be blocked by mines and by blasting.[4] A road from Médenine to the great oasis at El Hamma, west of Gabès, leads across the southwestern end of the Mareth Position and into the mountains. From Toudjane, a village at the eastern edge of the interior plateau, it continues for thirteen miles farther northwest to Matmata, another Berber community, and after ten miles more of twisting progress, reaches the northern limit of the entire hill mass. Far to the south, where the hills become more scattered, a road from Foum Tatahouine leads through them to the desert, which stretches away to Algeria. The desert is bounded on the north by vast, shallow, salt-crusted lakes, the great chotts, which extend across the middle of Tunisia from close to the Al-

[2] Generalmajor Fritz Krause describes the program of development undertaken in the Mareth Position. See MS # D–046, *Beitraege ueber die Mareth-Stellung, 2.Teil: Erkundung und Ausbau* (Krause).

[3] Maps, *Nr. 5 (19.III.43), Nr. 6 (21. u. 22.III.43), Nr. 9 (24.III.43)*, all 1:50,000, in *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB, Anlagen, Lagekarten u. Einsatzskizzen.*

[4] Rommel so recommended to von Arnim after he had reached Wiener-Neustadt. Msg, Rommel to von Arnim, 12 Mar 43, in EAP 21–a–14/7. Translation in author's file, OCMH.

gerian border to within fifteen miles of the Golfe de Gabès. Ranges of mountains supplement the chotts as a complex barrier to north-south movement. At the eastern end are Gabès and the Chott (or Wadi Akarit) Position. Djebel Tebaga (469) along the southern edge of Chott el Fedjadj leaves a gap of barely 6,000 yards between its ridge and the northwesterly spur of the Matmata hills. The Djebel Halouga (222) and adjacent high ground north of the Matmata hills in effect extend the gap to the oasis of El Hamma. If a force could make its way through the Matmata hills to the desert, and pass along the rim of the desert toward El Hamma, it would still have to penetrate this 6,000-yard opening before it could break out onto the coastal plain. It might swing eastward at once and pass along the northern edge of the Matmata hills, but it would find the going easier if it continued north to El Hamma itself, before turning to the east to reach Gabès. Such a maneuver would, by first winning a victory over natural obstacles and thereafter over defenders in the El Hamma gap, flank the Mareth Position and bring the force onto the coastal plain in the rear of its defenders. The difficulties were deemed insuperable for a substantial force with wheeled vehicles at the time the French were building the Mareth Line, but that view no longer prevailed. Indeed, advice on how to turn the line in this way was submitted from General Catroux to the Allies and transmitted to AFHQ.[5]

Rommel's Analysis of the Mareth Position

Field Marshal Rommel's confidence in the Mareth Position was not very firm. The line, he thought, could be enveloped by comparatively strong forces from either the south or the west. The British could be relied upon to attempt such a maneuver. Two passes, Beni Kreddache and Ksar el Hallouf, through which the British could cross the mountain barrier south of the line, would require outlying defensive forces. The deep northwestern flank would have to be protected south of El Hamma with other separate mobile elements. Finally, reserves also had to be in readiness to meet an attack from the direction of Gafsa. In the main Mareth Line, the Axis because of the limited time available had to adopt the concrete emplacements and pillboxes of the French as the core, but the structures could be used for excellent shelter only, since the ironwork was very badly rusted. Guns would have to be emplaced in field positions between individual pillboxes. The old French line of fortifications was dominated by heights a few miles in front of the main positions. They could thus be brought under observed artillery fire while their own observation was seriously restricted. To retain possession of the heights as long as possible was therefore essential. Moreover, the Italian artillery in the main line, which greatly exceeded that of the German units in number of pieces (340 Italian, 65 German), would be outranged unless set up ahead of the fortification toward the heights. Mines and tank traps would be needed to furnish security for the guns in these forward positions.

The Gabès–Tripoli highway divided the main fortified line into two sectors, with the sector to the northeast on the more vulnerable terrain. The British attack on the forward positions would probably begin there and, after a successful break-in, would be in a position to roll up the forward portion of

[5] Msg, TROOPERS to Mideast, 1730, 15 Jan 43, repeated to FREEDOM. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 147.

the southern sector. After gaining possession of all the advanced positions, the attackers could be expected to move along either side of the highway against the Italian *XX Corps*.

Rommel recommended that the reinforcement and re-equipment of German units be expedited and that the lesson of El 'Alamein with reference to the expenditure of artillery ammunition be applied. This would require that three units of fire be kept at the firing positions, three more in accessible dumps, and another three in the reserve. He indicated the disposition of mobile troops which seemed to promise the best results, and added: "If the enemy intends an encirclement to the west . . . as is assumed, it is all the more important to defend the Beni Kreddache and Ksar el Hallouf passes and to force him into a time-consuming detour as far to the south as possible, at least as far as Foum Tatahouine." The Axis could not meet an envelopment against the deep northwest flank by counterattack for lack of forces, and even a firm defense of the flank would drain off the reserves being held either to resist an attack from Gafsa or to support the main front (*15th Panzer Division, Panzer Grenadier Regiment Africa, 1st Luftwaffe Jaeger Brigade,* and reinforced *7th Bersaglieri Battalion*). But, as Rommel saw it, if the *First Italian Army* were properly replenished, had time to finish preparations, kept its mobile reserves instead of using them to repel an attack from Gafsa, and received resolute fighting from its Italian divisions, it might at least win a decisive defensive success.[6]

The Gap Leading to El Hamma

From the point of view of Allied forces operating in southern Tunisia, the road through the valley from Gafsa to El Hamma and Gabès was potentially a protected route for timely intervention from the west in any battle in the coastal corridor. North of the chotts two mountain chains form a valley running east and west. Passage through this valley—fifteen miles at the narrowest point—is further restricted by small salt marshes and several separate prominent hills. The northern chain is broken at the western end of Djebel Orbata (1165) just south of the oasis of Gafsa, but extends eastward for sixty miles from that opening as far as the village of Mezzouna. (*See Map V.*) The U.S. II Corps east of Tébessa might drive down this valley either to strike at Gabès or to hit the Axis line of communications north of the coastal narrows, compelling *Army Group Africa* to fight two separate but related battles. The very threat of such action would divert Axis forces from other positions or thin them out where strength already barely met requirements. Thus the Allies could use the Gafsa–Gabès valley in a manner reminiscent of the way the Shenandoah Valley was utilized during the American Civil War. In the developing crisis of March 1943, all routes in southern Tunisia seemed to lead to the focal point near Gabès.

The small reconnaissance teams of the Eighth Army's Long Range Desert Group which investigated the routes of overland travel west of the Matmata mountains in January and early February got as far as Tozeur, where they made contact with some

[6] (1) Memo, *Panzer Army Africa Nr. 30/43,* 9 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, KTB, Anlagenband 8, Anlage 1031/1.* (2) Von Arnim's general directive for defense of the Mareth Position, 11 Mar 43, in *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB, Anlagen, Anlage 14.*

men from British First Army. They returned to Eighth Army with encouraging reports. It appeared that no obstacles existed which the Eighth Army could not surmount with the aid of bulldozers and other tracked vehicles. A flanking force of considerable strength could reach the El Hamma gap.[7] On the basis of this information, and what was known of the structure and organization of the Mareth Position, General Montgomery drafted the first tentative plan for his attack on the Mareth Position (Operation PUGILIST GALLOP).

Plans for Operation PUGILIST GALLOP

The British Eighth Army approached the fight for the Mareth Position in a spirit of strong confidence. The units were battle-seasoned. They had driven Rommel's army from the field in one of the war's decisive battles. Although they had not brought the enemy to a stand, they had won a long series of subsequent small victories which they had capped by successfully holding their positions against counterattack near Médenine. They thought that Rommel was still commanding the opposing forces, but in view of their triumphs no longer feared him.

The plan of attack was incisively explained to all commanders by General Montgomery himself.[8] The Eighth Army planned to move on 20 March, when the moonlight would for the first time facilitate a night assault after other required preparations had been made. About one fourth of the force would pass through the mountains at a point 60 miles south of the Mareth Line, continue over 140 miles to El Hamma gap by night marches, and, after breaking through there, would swing to the east to disrupt the enemy's rear. While this long flanking march and ensuing attack were being executed, the main thrust would be made near the coast. The terrain there was marshy; the area for maneuver was somewhat cramped; the Zigzaou wadi was at its widest and deepest; but the belt of advanced defenses was narrow and the strongpoints, with fields of fire restricted by rolling terrain, were therefore less effective than others farther to the southwest.[9] The Italian defenders could probably be thrown back somewhat more easily than their better armed and more determined German associates. Once infantry was through the main barrier and established on the northern side, two armored divisions could cross to exploit to the west and southwest. If both the main and flanking attacks succeeded, the Axis forces would be separated and cut off in such a manner that no firm defense could be made short of Sfax. That city was named as the objective of the operation.

The Eighth Army entered the battle for the Mareth Position organized into two regular and one provisional corps. The enveloping march and attack through El Hamma gap were assigned to a provisional New Zealand Corps under Lt. Gen. Sir Bernard C. Freyberg. The force numbered about 27,000 men. It consisted of the 2d New Zealand Division; the 8th Armoured Brigade; the French L Force (General LeClerc) of 2,000–3,000 Senegalese with French officers; the King's Dragoon Guards

[7] (1) R. L. Kay, *Long Range Desert Group in the Mediterranean* (Wellington, New Zealand, 1950), pp. 12, 16. (2) Montgomery, *El Alamein to the Rio Sangro*, p. 76. (3) Philip Furneaux Jordan, *Tunis Diary* (London, 1943), pp. 178–79, describes meeting one of the reconnaissance teams at Tozeur on 5 February 1943.

[8] Montgomery, *El Alamein to the Rio Sangro*, p. 79.

[9] MS #D–046 (Krause).

(an armored car regiment); one regiment each of field and medium artillery; and the Greek Sacred Squadron, in some 30 jeeps with mounted machine guns. The 120 tanks and 112 field and 172 antitank guns, the hundreds of trucks, cars, and tracked vehicles, after falling back to the road fork at Ben Gardane and turning southwest, would enter the mountains near Foum Tatahouine.

The main attack was to be delivered on a 1,200-yard front close to the seacoast by 30 Corps under General Leese. It would include the British 50th (Northumberland) and 51st (Highland) Divisions, 4th Indian Division, and British 201st Guards Brigade. The third major element of the army, 10 Corps, commanded by General Horrocks, consisted of the 1st and 7th Armoured Divisions and 4th Light Armoured Brigade. It was to be held in reserve at first and then pass through a gap gained by the infantry in order to exploit access to the enemy's rear areas.[10]

The attack by Eighth Army was to receive the fullest possible assistance from the Allied air forces. In general, plans called for operations on the part of Northwest African Air Forces against Axis aviation which would provide air supremacy in the battle area, permitting the Western Desert Air Force and the American Ninth Air Force to concentrate on the tactical support of Eighth Army. In fulfillment of this program, the Northwest African Tactical Bomber Force and the major part of the Strategic Air Force were committed to strikes on the Axis landing fields in the vicinity of Gabès, Djebel Tebaga Fatnassa (270), and Mezzouna on 20 and 21 March. These operations, along with others by the Tactical Air Force against these fields and in the air, eventually drove Axis air units northward to the Sfax–La Fauconnerie area.[11] The ground battle was fought with extensive assistance by the Western Desert and U.S. Ninth Air Forces.

[10] Info supplied by Cabinet Office London.

Defense Plans

For the defense of the Mareth–El Hamma positions General Messe in mid-March had disposed the forces of his *First Italian Army* along the fortified line as follows:

(1) On the coastal plain, from northeast to southwest—the Italian *XX Corps* under Generale di Divisione Taddeo Orlando, including the *136th (Young Fascists) Division,* commanded by Generale di Divisione Nino Sozzani and the *101st (Trieste) Division* under Generale di Brigata Francesco La Ferla (the latter's sector embracing the village of Mareth).

(2) In the center, the German *90th Light Africa Division* under Generalmajor Theodor Graf von Sponeck. The seven battalions and six batteries of this unit held a sector through which the heavily mined highway from Médenine to Mareth ran until just south of the village of Arram, where it turned northward into *Division Trieste*'s sector before again swinging northwestward to Mareth.

(3) In the western portion, the Italian *XXI Corps,* commanded by Generale di Corpo d'Armata Paolo Berardi, consisting of the *80th (La Spezia) Division* under Generale di Brigata Gavino Pizzolato, and the *16th (Pistoia) Motorized Division* under Generale di Brigata Giuseppe Falugi

[11] Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces,* II, 173–78. (2) AFHQ G–3 Rpts. 132, 20 Mar 43, and 146, 2 Apr 43.

(nearest Toudjane) with the German *164th Light Africa Division* under Generalmajor Kurt Freiherr von Liebenstein. This German division was in a zone extending across the belt of hills north of Hallouf pass and centering on Matmata. It had been reduced to four battalions and one battery prior to the Mareth battle. Special detachments defended the defiles of Hallouf and Beni Kreddache and the tracks leading westward from them.

Along the line in the coastal zone, the *19th Flak Division* (*Luftwaffe*) under Generalmajor Gothard Frantz had placed sixteen dual-purpose 88-mm. flak batteries and numerous 20-mm. antiaircraft batteries.[12]

The hills from Tamezred to Djebel Melab (333) and the narrow gap from there to Djebel Tebaga were in a sector with field works defended by the *Saharan Group* (*Raggruppamento Sahariano*), commanded by Generale di Brigata Alberto Mannerini. This force was a miscellaneous aggregation amounting to nine battalions and eleven batteries. In a second defense line to the rear and along the Ez Zerkin wadi were the army reserves. Nearest the coast the *1st Luftwaffe Brigade,* by now reduced to the strength of a reinforced battalion, held a narrow sector behind the *Young Fascists Division.* Next to it was the *Panzer Grenadier Regiment Africa* covering the Mareth–Gabès road. The *15th Panzer Division* covered the gap between the highway and the Matmata mountains. Farther to the rear, the *21st Panzer Division,* instead of making a contemplated swift thrust through Gafsa at French forces in Tozeur, on 17–18 March moved to an assembly area fifteen miles southwest of Gabès and ten miles west of Mareth. From this position it could support either the coastal or the northwestern portions of the Mareth Line.[13] The *10th Panzer Division* remained well north of Gabès near Sousse, subject to call. None of these divisions was up to anything like its full strength in men, tanks, or other weapons. Some 50,000 Germans and 35,000 Italians were in the *First Italian Army,* according to the highest Allied estimate. This was slightly higher than the actual ration strength of that Army which amounted to 77,473 late in February, with only insignificant changes since that date. Eighth Army had 37 infantry battalions in the area to the enemy's 45 (in his infantry divisions); 1,481 guns to the enemy's 680; 623 tanks to the enemy's 150, and air strength of at least two to one.[14]

The defense of the Mareth Position against British Eighth Army's attack was undertaken in an atmosphere of strained German-Italian relations in the field. This condition, recurrent if not continuous, was rendered much more severe during the week before the attack. The Germans of what was formerly Rommel's army were unhappy over its fate. Rommel himself was never reconciled to the Italian decision that the stand in Tunisia against the Eighth Army should be made at the Mareth Line rather than just north of Gabès in the Chott Position. The decision at the highest levels against his proposals of 3 March to

[12] *Lagekarte Nr. 1,* 1:100,000, 11 Mar 43, in *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB, Anlagen, Lagekarten v. Einsatzskizzen.*

[13] *21st Panzer Div, KTB,* 13–17 Mar 43.

[14] (1) AFHQ G–2 Weekly Sum, 22 Mar 43. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (3) Strength Rpt, 28 Feb 43, in *Panzer Army Africa, O Qu, KTB, 16.II.–31.III.43, Anlage 232.* (4) Evening Rpt, *Comando Supremo to OKH/GenStd H/Op Abt,* 16 Mar 43, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt, Meldungen des Ob Sued, 1.III.–30.IV.43, Band I.* (5) Messe, *La Ia Armata Italiana in Tunisia,* p. 80.

concentrate all Axis forces in the Enfidaville line until the supply problem had been solved was doubtless disappointing, but he would not take no for an answer. In his visit to Hitler's headquarters on 10 March he again attempted to gain the Fuehrer's approval for a withdrawal into the smaller bridgehead. Although Rommel was again rebuffed, Hitler agreed to a redisposition of the forces of the *First Italian Army*.[15]

Rommel argued that the consequences of a possible Allied break-through at the Mareth Line, coupled with a flanking attack, could be averted only by strengthening the Chott Position at once with all available means. He suggested that two nonmobile Italian divisions, then in the Mareth Line, be immediately sent to the Chott Position to begin the construction work and that the defense of Mareth Line pass to German mobile units supported by Italian motorized elements on the flanks.

Rommel deemed the combined Italian and German forces in the Mareth Line ample for a subsequent defense of the Chott Position. The *10th, 15th,* and *21st Panzer Divisions* would then be available to operate under *Headquarters, DAK,* as *Army Group Africa* reserve. Such a disposition of forces would, in Rommel's view, provide for a delaying action in the wider southern approaches to the Gabès corridor and a stronger defense near its northern end.[16]

Hitler agreed with Rommel and Jodl so informed *OB SOUTH*. Kesselring was to move the *Spezia* and *Pistoia Divisions* to the Chott Position. The *Centauro Division* was to take over the flank protection mission of the *164th Light Africa Division* in the Matmata mountains. The latter would then move into the Mareth Line, while the *Trieste Division* provided security east of Gafsa. The Luftwaffe was to win time for the ground forces to carry out these moves by increasing its activity. Kesselring was determined to seek a change in these orders when he met Hitler and Doenitz at Rastenburg on 14 March to confer about supply. They were not communicated to *Comando Supremo*. The orders went directly to von Arnim from *OB SOUTH* only on 14 March, the day Kesselring flew to Rastenburg.[17]

On the afternoon of the 14th von Arnim went to the headquarters of the *First Italian Army* to see to the immediate execution of the orders he had just received. Messe, who was busy carrying out the instructions he had received only a few days earlier to hold to the end in the Mareth Position, was dumfounded. He protested that the change of plans would have a bad effect on the morale of his Army. He regarded the wholesale shift in the disposition of his forces and the complicated movements involved as inadvisable in the face of the Eighth Army's expected attack. It seemed to him tantamount to the first stage in a withdrawal to the Enfidaville Position, in the guise of an order to create a unified Mareth-Chott defense. He demanded to know if his organization

[15] MS # C–065a (Greiner), 11 Mar 43.

[16] (1) Ltr, Rommel to von Arnim, 12 Mar 43, in EAP 21–a–14/7. (2) *OKW/WFSt, KTB,* 12 Mar 43.

[17] Messe, *La Ia Armata Italiana in Tunisia,* pp. 72–74. On 13 and 14 March von Arnim complained to various officers in higher headquarters that Kesselring on the 13th had forbidden him to send tactical reports to OKW, OKH, and Rommel. On 23 March Hitler reaffirmed the right of all higher headquarters to communicate directly with him, sending information copies to their immediate superiors. Msgs, von Arnim (1) to Rommel, *OKW/WFSt,* and OKH, and (2) others, in EAP 21–x–14/2.

of the Mareth Position, previously directed, was now to be replaced by a withdrawal to the Chott. Von Arnim merely replied that he had received orders that Messe must carry out. The only concession Messe obtained was to be allowed to keep the *Trieste* and *Centauro Divisions* in place, while moving the *Spezia* and *Pistoia Divisions.*

Meanwhile, Kesselring obtained from Hitler a reversal of the new orders. Notified on 16 March, Messe halted all movements and returned the troops to their former positions. *Comando Supremo,* until now basking in happy ignorance of moves and countermoves within the German command, was suddenly alerted to the circumvention of its nominal authority and asked for explanations from all concerned, but received little satisfaction.[18] Thus on the eve of the Mareth battle, General Messe and his German associates in Tunisia were at odds; the anti-Italian attitude implied in the proposed shifts among the defending troops produced resentment; and the changes in plan gave the Italians further grounds for distrust of German leadership.[19]

The Battle on the Coastal Plain

Ground operations opened on the night of 16–17 March with preliminary attacks by elements of the British 30 Corps. The British 50th and 51st Divisions launched separate assaults with the objective of pressing back enemy outposts in the forefield of the Mareth Position. Both divisions succeeded in advancing their lines. A third attack, launched in the 10 Corps zone by the 201st Guards Brigade, was directed against a prominent hill, near the Médenine–Mareth highway, which gave the Germans good observation of the British line in this sector. The object of the attack was not only to sieze this hill but to induce the defenders to expect the main thrust to be made between the Mareth road and the Matmata mountains. The Germans were ready. They drove the Guards back to their lines with heavy casualties, and retained their observation post.

These preliminary attacks cost the enemy 195 killed or wounded and 69 missing and yielded British intelligence valuable information on Axis dispositions.[20]

The enemy was husbanding his artillery ammunition, especially in 100-mm. shells. The *First Italian Army* had at its immediate disposal 56 tanks: 29 German and 27 Italian. The *German Africa Corps,* with the *10th* and *21st Panzer Divisions,* and a total of 94 tanks, was in army group reserve. The *21st Panzer Division,* which had been moved toward Mareth on 17–18 March to counterattack if necessary in conjunction with the *15th Panzer Division,* was not expected to arrive in its assembly area before the morning of the 19th.[21]

German air reconnaissance observed the movement of the 6,000 vehicles of New Zealand Corps on 18 March. General Messe was led by this movement, along with other Allied preparatory shifts, to the conclusion on 19 March that an attack at the El Hamma gap by one armored division, one infan-

[18] (1) Messe, *La Ia Armata Italiana in Tunisia,* pp. 72–74. (2) *German CofS, First Italian Army, KTB,* 14 Mar 43.

[19] (1) *OKW/WFSt, KTB,* 10–13 Mar 43. (2) *German CofS, First Italian Army, KTB,* 10 Mar 43. (3) Messe, *Come Fini' La Guerra in Africa,* pp. 88–90.

[20] Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[21] See n. 14 (3). (2) *21st Panzer Div, KTB,* 18 Mar 43. (3) Daily Rpt, *Comando Supremo* to *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt,* 17, 18 Mar 43, in *OKH/Gen StdH/Op Abt, Meldungen des Ob Sued, v. 1. III.–30.IV.43, Band I.*

try division, and one motorized brigade should be expected in three or four days, at the same time that the main blows were being struck against the Mareth Line by at least three Allied infantry divisions, two infantry brigades, two armored divisions, and two armored brigades.[22]

The Western Desert Air Force participated in the operations to break the Mareth barrier with twenty-two squadrons of fighters and fighter bombers (535 aircraft), seven squadrons of bombers (140 aircraft), and almost three reconnaissance squadrons.[23] The full program of preparatory bombing was cut down by inclement weather but on 20 March, the very day of the first major attack, escorted bomber formations flew nine missions against Axis gun positions, transport, and concentrations of troops in the Mareth area. Fighter bombers also hit the area once and the Gabès airfield once. During this operation, PUGILIST GALLOP, the enemy was bombed each night.[24]

The British opened the main attack on the Mareth Line with an extremely heavy artillery preparation by over 300 guns in the evening of 20 March. The enemy estimated that 20,000 rounds fell in the *Young Fascists* sector, nearest the coast, and about 16,000 rounds in the *90th Light Africa Division*'s area farther west.[25]

Eighth Army assigned the attempt to punch through the final line to British 30 Corps. The 30 Corps assigned it to the British 50th Division, which gave the mission to the 151st Brigade and 50th Royal Tank Regiment (fifty-one tanks, of which eight had 6-pounder guns). The British 69th Brigade and a detachment of the 9th Field Squadron, Royal Engineers, were expected to clear a path to the Zigzaou wadi and to set up protection on the southwestern flank for the crossing of that barrier at three points—one for each of two infantry battalions and one for the tanks. Following closely an artillery barrage, and led by "Scorpions" (tanks equipped with flailing chains on revolving drums to detonate enemy mines), the tanks of the armored column would carry fascines, ten feet long and eight feet in diameter, to make the wadi crossing and that of the steep-sided antitank ditch beyond it passable for the heavy vehicles. The infantry and tanks were to fan out on the far side in a bridgehead from which the enemy was to be cleared by battles at numerous strongpoints.

Severe difficulties impeded the first night's operations. The British force opened the path to the wadi and established the flank protection, but the Scorpions failed and the mines had to be more slowly removed by engineers using detectors. The infantry crossed successfully but the tanks were delayed. Some of their fascines were ignited and had to be replaced from a stock farther to the rear. Enemy fire was heavy and continuous and, near the wadi's edge, knocked out several tanks. In the wadi itself, troops removed the mines despite intense fire, but from one bank to the other they found the bottom to be very soft, with the fifty-foot channel for the running stream particularly so. Four tanks got across both the wadi and

[22] Msg, Messe to *Army Group Africa* and *German CoS, First Italian Army,* 19 Mar 43, in *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB, Anlagen, Anlage 45.*

[23] While the number of squadrons is precise, the number of aircraft is in each case an estimate of those serviceable, based on statistics for 21 March 1943 for Western Desert Air Force and Eastern Air Defense as supplied by Air Ministry, London.

[24] (1) *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB,* 20–23 Mar 43. (2) AFHQ G–3 Rpt No. 133 (for 20 Mar 43).

[25] Daily Rpt, *German CoS, First Italian Army, to Army Group Africa,* 21 Mar 43, in *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB, Anlagen, Anlage 52.*



SHERMAN TANK WITH "SCORPION" ATTACHMENT. *The "scorpion" was a revolving drum with chains attached that acted as a flail when in motion and could clear a path through a mine field.*

the antitank ditch, but a fifth settled into soft ground almost up to its turret, and could not be removed with the means at hand. Construction of a route around this obstacle before daylight was impossible. Thus the 151st Brigade, with only these four tanks of the 50th Royal Tank Regiment, reached the far side of the Zigzaou wadi to establish the bridgehead.

During the next day, the 151st Brigade, reinforced, successfully extended its area for about two miles along the wadi and one mile in depth. The Italians, in spite of German efforts to prevent them, surrendered freely as opportunity offered. One battalion of the *90th Light Africa Division,* artillery units from the *15th Panzer Division,* the *Luftwaffe Jaeger Brigade,* and the *Panzer Grenadier Regiment Africa* were committed to reinforce the *Young Fascists Division.* British attempts on the second night to get the rest of the tanks across were successful, but a firm road for wheeled vehicles they could not construct, so that antitank guns and field artillery had to support the shallow bridgehead from the Eighth Army's side of the wadi. During the night, the fine weather came to an end. March 22 opened with

low clouds and intermittent but very heavy showers.[26]

At 1300, the *15th Panzer Division* counterattacked after organizing near Zarat, placing the British in a difficult position. Launched with almost thirty tanks and two battalions of infantry, the counterattack was impeded but not stopped by the rain-soaked ground and was in full course by 1700. The British Valentine tanks were no match for the Mark III's and IV's. Support by Western Desert Air Force was washed out by the weather just as the enemy's drive was getting under way. By the time the skies had cleared, the battle had brought British and Axis units so close together that Allied aircraft could not helpfully intervene.[27] Fighting bitterly at various localities, British troops held until darkness, when they began to withdraw across the wadi. About thirty-five British tanks and 200 prisoners were left in enemy hands.[28] The bridgehead no longer existed. All elements on the far side of the wadi were recalled before morning, 24 March.

Following the storms and rain which blighted 30 Corps' effort to enlarge its bridgehead across the Zigzaou wadi, the weather was brilliantly clear and the nights illuminated by an almost full moon. On the nights of 24–25 and 25–26 March it was possible for the bombers of the Western Desert Air Force to make 322 sorties over the El Hamma area, where they attacked enemy signal and supply and communications.[29] At the same time, the Strategic Air Force hit the port at Sousse and the airfield near Djebel Tebaga Fatnassa, northwest of Gabès.[30]

The Shift to Operation SUPERCHARGE II

Inability to maintain the bridgehead which British 30 Corps had gained during the night of 20–21 March and to use it as a base for a breakout to the rear of the Mareth Position forced General Montgomery to adopt an alternative. Operation PUGILIST GALLOP had gone awry. In trying to make the critical decision whether to try attacking elsewhere on the coastal plain, or in the mountains, or on the northwestern flank beyond the mountains, he had the benefit of an initial success by General Freyberg's provisional New Zealand Corps. That force arrived south of El Hamma gap, after almost forty-eight hours of arduous and unexpectedly swift marching over the edge of the desert, in midafternoon of 21 March. Here the enemy line of mines, tank traps, and gun positions curved southward to cover the fork formed by the junction of tracks from Gabès and El Hamma with the one leading past the southern side of Djebel Tebaga toward Kebili. The approaching force stopped out of artillery range, reconnoitered, deployed, and made surveys to enable the artillery to fire without preliminary registration. Instead of waiting for the next day, General Freyberg's command prepared to attack that very night. Much battle experience enabled the New Zealanders to execute such an operation in the bright moonlight, and in particular to drive an enemy force

[26] Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[27] (1) Info supplied by Air Ministry, London. (2) *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB,* 21–22 Mar 43.

[28] (1) *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB,* 23 Mar 43, says forty-five tanks. (2) See also Montgomery, *El Alamein to the Rio Sangro,* pp. 81–83. (3) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[29] Info supplied by Air Ministry, London.

[30] AFHQ G–3 Rpt 138, 25 Mar 43.

from an outpost on Hill 201, a mesa rising in the middle of the gap about a mile from its southern entrance. Hill 201 dominated the lower adjacent ground. The New Zealanders won it at a cost of 65 casualties and took nearly 850 Italian prisoners. It remained in Allied hands thereafter, despite sturdy counterattacks.

While the New Zealand Corps was completing its approach on 21 March, the *21st Panzer Division* started westward to support the Italians in the El Hamma gap and the *164th Light Africa Division* withdrew through the hills northwest of Toudjane and Matmata. At 1030, 22 March, the latter division received orders to continue toward the northwestern front, to participate in the counterattack to regain Hill 201, which the *21st Panzer Division* had thus far been unable to regain that morning. The *164th Light Africa Division* was consequently on the way there on the same afternoon that the *15th Panzer Division* off to the east was counterattacking against the northern edge of the 50th Division's bridgehead and about to wipe it out altogether. As General von Liebenstein's division approached, General Freyberg's forces were not only maintaining their hold on Hill 201 but clearing the hills on either side of the gap, working in general to the northeast.[31] Late on 22 March, having failed to regain the hill, the Axis command accepted the necessity of pulling its line in the El Hamma gap back about three miles from the first location.

By evening of 22 March it had become obvious that the attack of British 30 Corps against the eastern end of the Mareth Position could make no further progress. General Freyberg's force, on the other hand, had made a successful penetration at El Hamma gap. It was also known that the enemy had now committed all his available reserves. Such was the situation when during the night General Montgomery had to determine the future course of the Eighth Army's attack.

With the same rapidity and assurance he had employed in meeting the vicissitudes of the Battle of El 'Alamein, General Montgomery decided to drop Operation PUGILIST GALLOP and to convert his flanking foray into the main effort.[32] His initial problem was to send reinforcements in sufficient strength and speed to retain the Allied advantage already gained in the El Hamma gap and thus to build up even faster than the enemy. He now shifted all his available reserves and resources to the west in support of General Freyberg's outflanking maneuver. Instructing 30 Corps to make every effort to tie down Axis reserves in the Mareth Line, Montgomery alerted General Horrocks' British 10 Corps headquarters with the 1st Armored Division for movement after dark on 23 March over the same route used by the provisional New Zealand Corps. From an assembly area east of Médenine, the 4th Indian Division was sent after darkness of 23 March toward Hallouf pass to open it for a shorter supply route to El Hamma gap, and to follow up the withdrawal to the north by *164th Light Africa Division*. The 4th Indian Division was to take Toudjane and gain control of the northeastern section of the Matmata hills. It thus might obtain a route along which the 7th Armoured Division could make a short western hook around the Mareth Line and

[31] Kippenberger, *Infantry Brigadier,* pp. 280–82, gives a participant's narrative of the operations.

[32] Montgomery, *El Alamein to the Rio Sangro,* p. 82.

exploit the area south of Gabès. The enemy forces in the Mareth Position were to be held there by measures designed to look like preparations for a renewed thrust.

General Horrocks arrived at General Freyberg's command post during the afternoon, 24 March, to find the latter under insistent pressure by General Montgomery to make a full-scale attack, if possible on the very next afternoon. Freyberg had proposed some alternatives, all of which were rejected in favor of speed, and he and Horrocks finally concluded that a blitz attack in the manner of that which broke through at El 'Alamein, an Operation SUPERCHARGE II, could be attempted at 1600, 26 March.[33] Until then, all fighting would have to remain preliminary to the major battle.

On the enemy side General Mannerini, after canvassing with Generals Hildebrandt and von Liebenstein the prospects for a successful joint counterattack by their divisions to recapture Hill 201, canceled the project. The Allied intention to switch the point of their main attack to the El Hamma gap was correctly interpreted from Allied movements observed late on 23 March and again on 24 March. All that day, heavy movement to the south was reported by observers in the hills. The *15th Panzer Division,* which had been pulled back late on 23 March to an area northwest of the village of Mareth, continued during the night toward an area north of the Matmata hills from which it could move either back to the Mareth Line or on into the El Hamma gap; on the night of 24–25 March, the division took up positions southeast of Djebel Halouga. The forward line of enemy defenses from Djebel Tebaga through Djebel Melab and southeast to Tamezred was thereafter covered by German as well as Italian troops. The *164th Light Africa Division* took up positions on the northern flank, and agreement was reached that the boundary between the southeastern sector, under Italian *XXI Corps,* and the northwestern sector, under General von Liebenstein, would be about two miles east of Djebel Melab.[34] Despite the Allied grip on the southern entrance, these enemy measures seemed likely to make Allied progress up the gap toward El Hamma extremely difficult.

Two factors reduced the difficulty. One was the Allied air program for Operation SUPERCHARGE II. General Montgomery accepted Air Vice-Marshal Harry Broadhurst's proposal for extraordinary action by the Western Desert Air Force at the inception of the attack. The ground assault was to open about 1600, when the sun would be low on the horizon behind the attacking troops. It was to be preceded by a very heavy daylight air assault along El Hamma gap, supplemented by a rolling artillery barrage, both of which would be followed up closely by infantry and tanks. When the enemy's line of defenses had been breached, the armor was to pour through the opening and to thrust toward Gabès before daylight on 27 March. This program of co-ordinated attack promised to overcome the substantial advantage of the enemy's gun positions on high ground on either flank. The second factor contributing to the Eighth Army's success was perhaps unknown to its command. General Messe had been instructed by von Arnim on the morning of 24 March to withdraw to the Chott Position before being overwhelmed in the Mareth Line.

[33] Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[34] *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB,* 24–25 Mar 43.

General von Arnim surveyed the situation with Generals Bayerlein and Liebenstein on the morning of 24 March, when General Montgomery's new intentions had been confirmed, and in view of the Allied pressure also at El Guettar and Maknassy, decided that the retreat to the Chott Position should be started during the approaching night. Von Arnim told Messe to begin his withdrawal by pulling out his nonmotorized Italian infantry at once, while holding present positions with mobile units. Messe did not agree with von Arnim on the urgency of the need to withdraw to the Chott Position, and protested that for lack of transport he could not begin it until 25 March. When Kesselring arrived on the afternoon of the 24th, he took the same view as Messe and advised him to launch a counterattack by the *15th Panzer Division* to improve the situation. General Messe, as a consequence of Kesselring's visit, informed General von Arnim, next morning, that he preferred a counterattack on the coastal plain to withdrawal from the Mareth Line, but was informed that a withdrawal would be necessitated by the situation farther north.[35]

It took British 10 Corps headquarters and the British 1st Armoured Division almost a full day longer to reach the northwestern battle area than it had taken the New Zealand Corps. They barely made the line of departure at the appointed hour on 26 March, but make it they did. The program of air bombardment which was to continue for about twenty-four hours preceding the assault was stopped in the morning by sandstorms on the airfields, but was executed with overwhelming results in the later phases beginning in midafternoon. On the hills beside the gap and to the east, a battle went on all day. Far forward, the 2d New Zealand Division waited for the attack to jump off. The first to attack was to be the 8th Armoured Brigade. Infantry lay all day concealed near the enemy in holes which had been dug during the preceding night. Over their heads the planes began roaring on their way to bomb and strafe the area to be attacked.

The air attack at 1530 was made by three formations of light and medium bombers, which dropped their bombs in pattern from low altitudes. Fighter bombers followed immediately in continuous low-level attacks. They kept arriving in fifteen-minute relays of about thirty planes which flew continuously over the enemy ahead of the ground troops for the next two and one-half hours. Fighter patrols protected the fighter bombers from enemy intervention, while simultaneous attacks on enemy airfields successfully forestalled opposition by Axis planes. Four hundred and twelve sorties were flown. With air co-operation to Operation SUPERCHARGE II thus completely undisturbed by the Luftwaffe, losses were limited to eleven pilots missing. Difficulties in co-ordinating the air with the ground action were anticipated and solved by the use of colored smoke and other devices for marking the area to be attacked. The troops started forward at 1600 at a swift rate, as prescribed in the plans, and closely behind the artillery barrage and the falling bombs.[36]

At the designated time the New Zealand infantry rose from their cover, marked the bomb line with orange smoke signals, and

[35] *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB,* 24–25 Mar 43. (2) Messe, *La Ia Armata Italiana in Tunisia, Allegato 16,* pp. 378–82.

[36] Info supplied by Air Ministry, London.

behind a swiftly creeping artillery barrage and low-level air attacks swept forward. The two center battalions of the *164th Light Africa Division* were overrun. Through the gap, the British armor then poured toward El Hamma and Gabès, leaving the infantry in heavy engagements behind them on the hills. The tanks penetrated about four miles before dark and, after waiting for the moon to rise, passed through the enemy's reserve armored elements before daybreak. Dawn on 27 March found them on the edge of El Hamma, where they were stopped by an antitank screen; General von Liebenstein sent reinforcements there to deter them as long as possible.

The Enemy Falls Back to the Chott Position

Full exploitation of the Allied breakthrough on 27 March was prevented for two days by determined and resourceful measures south of El Hamma by German armored elements, especially by General Borowiecz' *15th Panzer Division* with about fifty tanks. *Group von Liebenstein* left its hill positions southeast of Djebel Melab before daylight and took up mobile defense of a line between these hills, Djebel Halouga, and El Hamma. The British 1st Armoured Division was held off at the north and struck by a counterattack, delivered by elements of the *15th* and *21st Panzer Divisions,* on its eastern flank. This situation continued through 28 March, while during the night of 26–27 March the last of the nonmotorized elements of the Italian *XX Corps* pulled out of the coastal sector and in one bound shifted to the Chott Position. *XXI Corps* and *Group von Liebenstein* covered the withdrawal in the temporary position El Hamma–Gabès on 27 March. During the night of 28–29 March a British armored force from the south threatened to cut off *Group von Liebenstein* after pushing in one flank of the *15th Panzer Division* and thus gaining access to the area east of Djebel Halouga. During the night the Axis line, under considerable moonlight bombing, was pulled back north of El Hamma and Gabès, and on the following night, pulled back into the Chott Position. The battle of the Mareth Position had been won.

Ahead of the mobile German units, the Italians had been organized on a new defensive line. The *15th* and *21st Panzer Divisions,* and part of the *90th Light Africa Division,* went to an area west and southwest of Cekhira as army reserves, and reinforcements were soon going to the aid of the *10th Panzer Division* near El Guettar.[37] On 29 March, El Hamma and Gabès were in Allied hands. By the next evening, the most advanced Allied elements were in close proximity to the Chott Position.

British Empire Army took about 7,000 prisoners before winning the Mareth Position.[38] These losses had further sapped the resources of a badly equipped Axis force. Furthermore, the British had driven the enemy farther toward the ultimate constriction in northeastern Tunisia which General Alexander had been planning since he took command of 18 Army Group. But somewhat offsetting these gains for the moment was the fact that once again the defenders of a

[37] The reinforcements were the *Panzer Grenadier Regiment Afrika* on 29 March and, from the *21st Panzer Division,* first one light and then a heavy artillery battalion and by 31 March the entire *21st Panzer Division. German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB,* 26–31 Mar 43.

[38] Montgomery, *El Alamein to the Rio Sangro,* p. 88.

fixed position had escaped the tentacles of a flanking attack by Eighth Army's armored elements and had pulled back under orders of the high command. Could they now hold in the Chott Position at the Akarit wadi, the position that Rommel had favored in case the troops were not to shift all the way from Libya to northeastern Tunisia?

The two forces which had just concluded the major battle south and southwest of Gabès now spent a week preparing for a second set battle just north of the town at the Chott Position. Along this portion of the coastal plain, the corridor narrows to a short strip about fifteen miles wide, more than half of which is screened by a semicircle of low hills with precipitous slopes separated by narrow gaps. Across the narrows, the Akarit wadi has worn a trench extending inland about three miles from the sea before becoming so shallow as to constitute a minor dip in the surface. Although shorter than the Zigzaou wadi, in the Mareth Position, the Akarit is for the most part wider and deeper. Overlapping its western end and extending to the nearest hill, Djebel er Roumana (170), was a tank ditch which the enemy had dug across the plain. Other shorter trenches zigzagged across the entrances to the openings between the various hills in the semicircle. Against tanks which might succeed in pushing through the defile at the southwestern end of Djebel er Roumana and then start along its western side, the enemy, using obstacles, had strengthened a series of parallel wadies to form a dangerous area for the armored vehicles, an area difficult to cross and subject to fire from numerous antitank guns. A large double belt of mines from east to west in front of the Akarit wadi and its western extension was supplemented at other critical points by smaller mine fields.

Comando Supremo's preference for the Mareth Position had delayed measures to complete an interrelated system of barriers and protecting fire positions. With scarce construction materials sent to Mareth, the Chott Position had been only partly developed. Although it was strong, and although the enemy used the week after the Mareth Line was abandoned to make it even stronger, the position required much more work before full use could be made of its natural advantages. It also lacked depth. The threat of attack from the direction of El Guettar or Maknassy against the rear contributed to its vulnerability.[39]

Axis units were disposed in the Akarit position almost as they had been at Mareth. The only difference was that the *90th Light Africa Division* was this time inserted between the *Young Fascists Division* on the coast and the *Trieste Division* on the eastern portion of Djebel er Roumana, since the main highway passed nearer the shore than at Mareth. Farther to the west was the *Spezia Division.* The whole sector from the coast to Djebel Tebaga Fatnassa was under the command of the Italian *XX Corps.* Strung out along a much wider sector ranging across the hills as far as Djebel es Stah (318) were the *Pistoia Division,* covering the vital defile through which passed the road to El Guettar and Gafsa; next to it, from Djebel Haïdoudi (285) to the west, the remnants of the *164th Light Africa Division,* now completely immobile; and at the

[39] (1) Map, *Nr. 19* (1: 100,000), 4 Apr 43, in *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB, Anlagen, Lagekarten u. Einsatzskizzen.* (2) MS #T-3 (Nehring *et al.*), Pt. 3a.

extreme west flank, General Mannerini's *Raggruppamento Sahariano.* Some five miles to the north, on the boundary between *XX* and *XXI Corps,* was the *15th Panzer Division.* The *21st Panzer Division,* it will be remembered, had been sent to El Guettar in support of the *10th Panzer* and *Centauro Divisions* which were fighting to hold back the U.S. II Corps. General Messe's troops were supported by nine batteries of 88-mm. dual-purpose guns (*19th Flak Division*), placed to bolster the rather weak defenses, and execute both air and ground missions. Four more heavy batteries, with air missions, were placed farther north, along the coast.[40] The enemy was low in artillery ammunition, while his infantry had less than one full unit of fire. The general terrain formation, the nature of the Allied advance up to 4 April, and the area of impact of the Allied artillery, pointed to a main Allied effort against, and on each side of, Djebel er Roumana, despite the barriers of ditches, mines, and obstacles. Night infantry attacks against the heights with simultaneous or subsequent tank thrusts on both sides were to be expected, as well as local attacks against the passes farther west. *Division Trieste* held the eastern half and the *Division Spezia,* the western half of this principal hill.

The Enemy Is Driven to Northeastern Tunisia

After ascertaining on 31 March through reconnaissance attacks by British 10 Corps that the wadi could be forced, although at considerable cost, Eighth Army stopped to regroup. The attack was to be made by 30 Corps, using three divisions to gain a bridgehead for the British 10 Corps, with a division employed to feign an attack. Nearly 500 British tanks were put in readiness. Although the heavy pace of the Allied air attacks on the enemy warned him to expect the attack soon, he realized that it would have to be made at night to avoid observation of even its earliest stages. He therefore expected that it would not begin until after 15 April, when the moon would again be favorable.[41] Actually, General Montgomery had determined not to wait for a moonlit night but to attack in darkness. Montgomery thus attained surprise, for although the enemy had correctly divined the intended zone of British main effort, he had not expected it to come so soon.

The assault began at 0500, 6 April, with the British 51st Division advancing on the right, the British 50th Division in the center, and the 4th Indian Division on the left, all west of the coastal road and through the *Trieste, Spezia,* and *Pistoia Divisions* sectors. The scope of the attack was thus west of the deeper part of the Akarit wadi. The troops and vehicles crossed lesser tributary stream beds draining northeasterly under the thunderous cover of about 450 British guns firing on targets directly ahead of them. The main thrusts at first were on Djebel er Roumana and its companion hillock to the northeast (Hill 112), and against high points of a ridge to the southwest (mainly Hill 275).

[40] Overlay, *Nr. 18, Einsatz du Schweren Flakbatterien zu Erd–v. Luftschutz du 19. Flak-Division in der Akarit-Stellung* (1:100,000), 4 Apr 43, and map, *Nr. 20* (1:100,000), 6 Apr 43, both in *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB, Anlagen, Lagekarten u. Einsatzskizzen.*

[41] (1) Montgomery, *El Alamein to the Rio Sangro,* p. 90. (2) *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB,* 2 Apr 43, and Rpt, *German CoS, First Italian Army* to *Army Group Africa,* 4 Apr 43, *ibid., Anlagen, Anlage 116.* (3) The attack was Operation SCIPIO.

In the center advance by the 50th Division was held up by the antitank ditch which ran squarely across its path, and only during the middle of the day could this division gain its objective.

By that time, with many of the Italians readily surrendering, the attack had spread west along the hills. But counterattacks by the *90th Light Africa Division* by noon restored to the Axis control over Djebel er Roumana and most of the ridge dominated by Hill 275. The main body of *DAK, Army Group Africa*'s only reserve, was still tied down in the battles at El Guettar. But what little armor remained available to *DAK* was released to General Messe at 0930, 6 April. Toward noon General von Arnim arrived at the headquarters of the *First Italian Army*. Concluding that the time for a general withdrawal had not yet arrived, he took immediate steps to improve the Axis situation. From the *Fifth Panzer Army* sector he ordered the *47th Grenadier Regiment* sent to reinforce Bayerlein's German units. He also directed General Messe to supply transport for the *164th Light Africa Division*, now immobilized in positions far to the west of the Allied attack sector, so that the division could be committed where it was needed. The counterattack, then in progress against Hill 275, was to be relentlessly continued to regain the vital defile beyond it. To make General Bayerlein's authority complete, von Arnim authorized him to issue orders to German troops in the army group commander's name.

In the afternoon, the *15th Panzer Division* counterattacked and contained elements of British 10 Corps which had penetrated deep into the *Division Trieste*'s sector. Meanwhile the *200th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* of the *90th Light Africa Division* which had recaptured most of Djebel er Roumana, was forced into the defense and finally, after running out of ammunition, withdrew from the dominating hill. In the afternoon the German defenders were exhausted by their efforts without having been able to restore the original defensive line. The time for another large-scale withdrawal had come.

The next day's battle thus promised success to Eighth Army in breaking out of its bridgehead in the defensive positions, and in exploiting this break with armor on the plain beyond. Orders had already specified the separate lines of advance up the coast which the major units were to follow in the pursuit. The Axis command was aware of the prospects. The enemy's division and artillery commanders reported to *First Italian Army* as early as 1700, 6 April, that they could not hold another day. Generals Messe and Bayerlein both supported this view in reporting to *Army Group Africa*. Three hours later, the orders to withdraw during the night were received. While the mobile elements rode to their specified stations, large portions of the *90th* and *164th Light Africa Divisions* were obliged to march on foot.

Eighth Army opened the pursuit at about 1000, 7 April, with 30 Corps to the east and 10 Corps inland. At the same time some 7,000 prisoners were conducted from the battlefield to enclosures. The defensive position, in spite of its many natural advantages, had thus succumbed with startling swiftness to an attack made in superior strength, and with fierce resolution and unremitting pressure. It was a particularly frustrating battle for the Germans, who were inclined to attribute the defeat to their Italian allies, blaming the troops for not fighting and the

command for ineffective leadership.[42] But in view of the powerful British attack an impartial observer might well question whether even the best led force could have offered effective resistance with the means then available to the *First Italian Army.*

Eighth Army pursued the Axis forces up the coastal plain toward Enfidaville, 150 miles away, for the next five days. Its strength in operational tanks (almost 400), guns (600), antitank guns (950), and antiaircraft (490) was overwhelming. The airline distance of the pursuit was greatly extended by continuous maneuvering. The Italian troops went ahead, covered by the German units. The British 30 Corps carried out the pursuit with the 51st Division, 23d Armoured Brigade, 201st Guards Brigade, and the 7th Armoured Division. The 50th and 4th Indian Divisions were left behind to reorganize the area from El Hamma to the sea. Advancing along the coastal road the 30th Corps found its path barred by the *90th Light Africa Division* on the east and the *164th Light African Division* in the center, while British 10 Corps (1st Armoured Division, 2d New Zealand Division, and 8th Armoured Brigade, attached) contended with the *15th Panzer Division,* reinforced by a Tiger tank battalion, on the inland flank. At the extreme west, the troops of General Cramer's *German Africa Corps* which had been engaged at El Guettar and Maknassy, or were in the hills farther north, pulled out of the battle areas in time to keep ahead of pursuit. The German troops of *First Italian Army* were controlled completely and directly by their chief, General Bayerlein, under instructions received from *Army Group Africa.* General Messe seems to have been generally notified of action already taken rather than presented with matters for his decision.

The enemy crossed the Sfax–Faïd road shortly after noon, 9 April. While Sfax was still being evacuated, a threat by the British First Army from Fondouk el Aouareb against Kairouan caused General Bayerlein to string out his troops from northwest to southeast throughout the following night. British troops took Sfax on the morning of 10 April, and maintained light pressure until late in the evening on German troops south and southwest of Sousse. That night, the enemy troops shifted northwest of that port, and late on 11 April, they began arriving at the outlying defenses of the so-called Enfidaville position. British 9 Corps found Kairouan undefended. British 10 Corps shoved aside rear guards to capture Sousse at 0800 on 12 April. At the same time, 10 Corps established contact with the British 6th Armoured Division near Kairouan, and before nightfall on 13 April, forward elements of the 10 Corps had thrust to four miles south-southwest of Enfidaville, where they were stopped by German artillery. By 13 April, then, the Allied line faced an enemy concentrated in northeastern Tunisia. Contact was made at points extending from Enfidaville on the southeast through Pont-du-Fahs and Medjez el Bab to Sedjenane.[43]

The Eighth Army's operations had seriously cut down the strength of *Italian First*

[42] (1) Montgomery, *El Alamein to the Rio Sangro,* pp. 91–92. (2) Kippenberger, *Infantry Brigadier,* pp. 296–97. (3) *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB,* 6 Apr 43. (4) Memo, Gen Bayerlein for the *KTB, ibid.,* 5 May 43.

[43] (1) AFHQ G–3 Daily Rpts, 151–59, 7 Apr–15 Apr 43. (2) Eighth Army's casualties, 2–16 April were 2,708 (602 killed, 1,557 wounded, and 559 missing). Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

Army.[44] Ammunition was critically low, the replacement troops could not be furnished with all normal weapons, and morale was naturally shaken. However, the enemy command felt relieved that the Allies had failed to take advantage of the retreat to destroy Messe's army.[45]

The line to which these troops had been withdrawn consisted at best of rudimentary defensive works. On 10 April, General Messe recommended to General von Arnim that the line be drawn back somewhat into the foothills, but von Arnim refused.[46] General Bayerlein then set forth his own estimate, that the Enfidaville position was such only in name, and that with the supplies of ammunition so limited it simply could not be held. Finally, on 14 April, General von Arnim, after having inspected the positions himself, agreed. He also directed that Italian and German units should be interspersed, and he sustained General Bayerlein in a disagreement with General Messe over which division should have the mission of defending the coastal road to Enfidaville. Accordingly, instead of the *Young Fascists Division,* the *90th Light Africa Division* was committed there. During the next fortnight, the Eighth Army was to engage in some hard fighting but, for the present, the story of its activities must be left in order to consider what had been happening during the past month along the deep western flank and in the Eastern Dorsal.[47]

[44] *First Italian Army* was reduced by 10 April 1943 as follows:

Division Young Fascists
5 battalions (much depleted) and 27 guns
Division Trieste
4 battalions (much depleted) and 29 guns
Division Pistoia
2 battalions (being reconstituted) and 31 guns
Divisions Centauro and Spezia
practically destroyed
Corps and army artillery
7 105-mm. and 10 149-mm. guns
90th and 164th Light Africa Divisions
together they equal one infantry division (—)
15th Panzer Division
equal to a combat team
Army artillery
a few heavy batteries
Heavy antiaircraft
7 batteries (approximately)

Memo, *First Italian Army* to *Army Group Africa,* 10 Apr 43, in *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB, Anlagen, Anlage 150.*

[45] MS # T–3 (Nehring *et al.*), Vol. 3a.

[46] (1) Memo, *First Italian Army* to *Army Group Africa,* 10 Apr 43, in *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB, Anlagen, Anlage 150.* (2) *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB,* 11 Apr 43.

[47] Major sources for the pursuit up the coast are: (1) Montgomery, *El Alamein to the Rio Sangro,* pp. 89–94. (2) Messe, *Come Finì' La Guerra in Africa,* pp. 135–66. (3) *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB,* 31 Mar–14 Apr 43. (4) MS # D–315, The operations of the 164th Light Africa Division from the Chott Position to the end of the fighting in Africa, 29 Mar to 13 May 43 (General-major Kurt Freiherr von Liebenstein). (5) MS # T–3 (Nehring *et al.*), Vol. 3a.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Gafsa, Maknassy, and El Guettar (17–25 March)

18 Army Group's Plan for II Corps

The operations by II Corps in March were intended to accomplish a threefold purpose. Headquarters, First Army, issued a formal directive prescribing the corps mission shortly before II Corps passed to 18 Army Group's direct control.[1] The II Corps was to draw off reserves from the enemy forces facing the Eighth Army; to regain firm control of forward airfields from which to furnish assistance to Eighth Army; and to establish a forward maintenance center from which mobile forces of Eighth Army could draw supplies in order to maintain the momentum of their advance. This prospective supply point was to be established at Gafsa, which the II Corps was to retrieve from an Italian garrison by an attack to start not later than 15 March. Troops not required for the defense of Gafsa could then demonstrate toward Maknassy as a menace to the enemy's line of communications along the coast. In the meantime, the passes in the Western Dorsal from Sbiba southwestward to El Ma el Abiod were to be firmly held, while the airfields at Thélepte, in front of the Allied defensive line, were to be regained for the use of Allied fighter units. Of the enemy's combat troops, AFHQ estimated that 45,100 Germans and 28,000 Italians were in the Mareth–Matmata defenses, and 11,400 German and 12,800 Italians in the Gabès–Gafsa–Chott Position area. The garrison at Gafsa, with security forces to the west of it, amounted, AFHQ thought, to 7,100 Italians of the *Centauro Division;* eastward, from Sened to Maknassy were only 800 German and 750 Italian combat troops.[2] If this appraisal of the opposing forces was correct, the enemy would be forced to send reserves to try to stop the II Corps. The American forces had chiefly to avoid being caught in a weak situation during an enemy spoiling attack or by a counterattack provoked by an initial American success.[3] They were not expected to advance southeast of Gafsa.

The plans of 18 Army Group for the II

[1] Ltr of Instruc, 2 Mar 43, in II Corps AAR, 15 Mar–10 Apr 43.

[2] AFHQ G–2 Est 6, Axis Order of Battle, 12 Mar 43.

[3] (1) AFHQ G–2 Rpt 129, 16 Mar 43. (2) II Corps G–2 Est 18, 16 Mar 43.

Corps prescribed a subsidiary role which naturally disappointed its more confident American officers. The directive in effect prohibited an American advance to the sea and envisaged a hesitating movement subject at all times to 18 Army Group's approval, a program which indicated lack of confidence in the capacity of II Corps to execute a full-scale operation on its own responsibility. The higher echelons of command apparently considered the capabilities of the American units to be only partly developed. The February setback had revealed deficiencies and had presumably shaken the morale of participants. The forthcoming operations were therefore designed to permit small successes and the application of training lessons taught in battle schools instituted by 18 Army Group during the preceding fortnight. A few such victories, it was hoped, even though minor, would bring the performance of American units up to the required level by developing their capacities and fortifying their self-respect. But the Americans, particularly the more aggressive ones like the new corps commander, General Patton, tugged against the restraining leash from the start.[4]

Both 18 Army Group and *Army Group Africa* thought of the area in which the II Corps would undertake its March offensive operations as the deep northwestern flank of the Axis forces in the coastal region south of Gabès. A potential Allied thrust from the Tébessa area had available two major avenues of approach. The main route ran through the mountain-walled valley, north of the chotts. This valley could be entered at Gafsa and followed to either a southeastern or northeastern exit. The second route lay just to the north of that valley, and was separated from it by the long mountain ridge between Gafsa and Mezzouna. It too was protected throughout its eastern half by a mountain screen, for north of the ridge between Gafsa and Mezzouna a loop of somewhat lower hills extended between Djebel Goussa (625), near Station de Sened, and Djebel Zebbeus (451), north of Maknassy. The Allied forces intending to proceed along either of these avenues would necessarily begin by taking Gafsa. (*Map X*)

That oasis was the key. It lay in an exposed position, from a military standpoint, and had changed hands several times. When Field Marshal Rommel broke off his February offensive, he left there elements of *Division Centauro* which were linked with the main body of *Fifth Panzer Army* by small forward defense units in the Faïd–Maknassy area, and with the *Army Group Africa* reserves nearer Gabès. Whether in Allied or Axis possession, Gafsa was near the outer end of a line of communications, and correspondingly vulnerable. Tébessa was eighty-four miles to the northwest, while Sbeïtla, either via Fériana and Kasserine, or by way of Bir el Hafey, was almost as far to the north. Faïd pass, on the other hand, was seventy-two miles northeast by the most direct highway, and Maknassy was fifty miles east-northeast. Although American troops were relatively familiar with part of this area, they knew the Gafsa–Gabès valley chiefly from the maps, on which important topographical features were inexactly represented. Initially, Operation WOP, as the II Corps designated the undertaking, did not provide for sending American troops, except defensive and reconnaissance forces, beyond Gafsa into this valley.[5] The 1st Infantry Division was to

[4] (1) Alexander, "The African Campaign," p. 874. (2) Patton Diary, 25 Mar 43.

[5] II Corps FO 3, 12 Mar 43, in 1st Armd Div Hist, Vol. VII.

make the attack on Gafsa, with the 1st Armored Division initially protecting the northeastern flank of the advance, while troops of the French Southeast Algerian Command were to operate on the other flank south of the line Metlaouï–Djebel Berda (926).

If II Corps should continue toward Maknassy, an advance contemplated as the second phase of the attack, its elements would be on both sides of the mountain ridge extending between Gafsa and Mezzouna. At its western end the bare and rugged slopes of Djebel Orbata (1165) rose abruptly to a crest of about 3,500 feet. The contours of this somewhat twisting ridge softened, and the crests were lower, along its eastern half. Trails through its deeply eroded gulches and defiles were narrow and few. Contact between the two forces on either side would be restricted to the barest minimum from Gafsa to Sened village, that is, about halfway to Maknassy, and from that point to the tip of Djebel Bou Douaou (753), five miles east of Maknassy, would be severely limited. Simultaneous attacks along both sides of the ridge would have to be relatively independent of each other.

The Corps Plan: Operation WOP

General Patton took over command from General Fredendall at Djebel Kouif on the morning of 6 March, after conferences with Generals Eisenhower and Smith in Algiers and with his new superior, General Alexander, and others in Constantine.[6] Time before the operation was to begin was already short, and plans and preparations had to be expedited and co-ordinated. The tentative plans for II Corps, 1st Infantry Division, and 1st Armored Division, were considered in a commanders' conference on 8 March 1943, and with some minor modifications, were then approved by the new commanding general. General Alexander and the Chief of Staff, 18 Army Group, General McCreery, spent the next two days at II Corps headquarters while inspecting the principal elements of the corps. D Day was set back from 15 March to 17 March, closer to the Eighth Army's scheduled attack, by army group orders of 13 March, despite Patton's apprehensions that the enemy might strike first.[7] The II Corps' role in the forthcoming army group operations was, Patton decided, to be like that of Stonewall Jackson in the Second Battle of Manassas. The corps was to conduct a flank battle which would assist Eighth Army to break through enemy lines, as Jackson had aided Longstreet's corps.[8]

The Axis top command had recognized the Allied threat to the garrison at Gafsa but discounted it a few days before the at-

[6] (1) Memo of conf at Constantine, CinC AF with CG 18 A Gp, 7 Mar 43, in CinC AF Diary, 7 Mar 43. (2) Patton later described Alexander as "extremely able and very fine to serve under." Ltr, Patton to Marshall, 29 Mar 43. WDCSA 370 Africa 11 Apr 43. (3) Patton Diary, 5–7 Mar 43.

[7] (1) Patton Diary, 13 Mar 43. (2) The II Corps staff then included the following: chief of staff, Brig. Gen. Hugh J. Gaffey; G–1, Col. Samuel L. Myers; G–2, Col. B. A. Dickson; G–3, Col. Kent C. Lambert; G–4, Col. Robert W. Wilson; artillery, Col. Charles E. Hart; antiaircraft, Col. Robert H. Krueger. The staff of the 1st Armored Division included: chief of staff, Lt. Col. Grant A. Williams; G–1, Lt. Col. Loris R. Cochran; G–2, Lt. Col. M. M. Brown; G–3, Lt. Col. Hamilton H. Howze; G–4, Lt. Col. Percy H. Brown, Jr.; artillery, Col. Robert V. Maraist. The staff of the 1st Infantry Division included: assistant division commander, Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.; chief of staff, Col. Stanhope B. Mason; G–1, Lt. Col. Charles Ware; G–2, Lt. Col. Robert W. Porter, Jr.; G–3, Lt. Col. Frederick W. Gibb; G–4, Lt. Col. C. M. Eymer; artillery, Brig. Gen. Clift Andrus.

[8] Patton Diary, 14 Mar 43.

task, after Kesselring's assurances to Mussolini that the place was in no danger. The force there was strong, he declared, and the approaches were very heavily mined. Kesselring, in the same spirit of optimism, also advised the Duce to expect a defensive success even at the Mareth Position, where the British attack was expected as soon as the moon turned full.[9] General von Arnim thought well of a project to make a swift spoiling attack through Gafsa as far, perhaps, as Tozeur. At his prompting, General Hildebrandt went to El Guettar and on beyond Gafsa toward Fériana on the morning of 15 March, arranging tentatively with General Calvi de Bergolo for an attack by his *21st Panzer Division* and part of *Division Centauro* to take place about 19 March, and to extend to Fériana and Metlaouï.[10]

The II Corps on 15 March consisted of the 1st, 9th, and 34th Infantry Divisions, the 1st Armored Division, the 13th Field Artillery Brigade (Brig. Gen. John A. Crane) and the seven battalions of the 1st Tank Destroyer Group (Col. Burrowes G. Stevens), which had been parceled out to the four divisions and to corps reserves, plus corps troops—in all, 88,287 men.[11] Army group retained control of the 9th Division (minus Combat Team 60), the 34th Division, and the 13th Field Artillery Brigade. For training, 75 officers and 175 enlisted men of the U.S. 2d Armored and U.S. 3d Infantry Divisions were attached to II Corps.[12] British raiding parties from Eighth Army were active in front of II Corps behind the enemy's lines, while in the general area of the road through Bir el Hafey to Sidi Bou Zid and in the mountains to the south, two squadrons of the Derbyshire Yeomanry under II Corps control engaged in energetic reconnaissance.[13]

In the seizure of Gafsa, General Allen's reunited 1st Infantry Division was to be reinforced by the 1st Ranger Battalion and by several battalions of field artillery and tank destroyers. Elements of General Ward's 1st Armored Division, with Combat Team 60 attached, had the initial mission of providing protection against Axis attacks from the directions of Sidi Bou Zid or Maknassy. Meanwhile the two reinforced divisions completed preparations behind the main line of defense at the Western Dorsal, which General Ryder's 34th Infantry Division held in the Sbiba sector and General Eddy's 9th Infantry Division (less the 60th Combat Team), from Kasserine to El Ma el Abiod. General Allen's command was scheduled to approach Gafsa via Fériana on the night preceding its 17 March attack. General Ward's forces were to emerge through Kasserine pass and via Thélepte move to an assembly area east of Djebel Souinia (679), near the Gafsa–Sidi Bou Zid road.

The spring rains began falling heavily a few days before 17 March, filling the gullies, soaking the ground, and confining heavy vehicles to the roads. The II Corps sent a provisional detached armored flank

[9] Mins of conf, Mussolini, Ambrosio, and Kesselring, 11, 13 Mar 43, Nos. 54, 60. In Italian Collection, Item 26.

[10] Memo dated 15 Mar 43, in *21st Panzer Div, KTB Anlagen, Band 9.*

[11] (1) 1st TD Gp Outline Plan WOP, as given in Msg 1355, 12 Mar 43, Entry 64, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. This lists the following tank destroyer battalions: 601st attached to the 1st Infantry Division, 701st and 776th attached to the 1st Armored Division, 813th attached to the 34th Infantry Division, 894th attached to the 9th Infantry Division, 805th and 899th in II Corps reserves. (2) II Corps AAR, 2 May 43, App. A.

[12] Msgs, 14 Mar 43, Entries 153 and 159, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[13] (1) II Corps AAR, 10 Apr 43. (2) Msg, 23 Mar 43, Entry 112, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

force to the Sbeïtla area under command of Col. Clarence C. Benson, Commanding Officer, 13th Armored Regiment, on the night of 14–15 March, while Combat Command B of the 1st Armored Division started by daylight on 16 March to make certain of reaching its positions in time for the next day's attack. The 19th Combat Engineers had in only three days graded a new dirt road from the vicinity of Thélepte directly to the Gafsa–Sidi Bou Zid road. This new route, named "the Welvert road," was used by General Ward's units. The 1st Engineer Battalion lifted some 2,000 mines along the routes of approach beyond Fériana used by General Allen's attacking elements.[14]

The Occupation of Gafsa

General Allen's plan for taking Gafsa, in this first operation by his whole division against Axis troops, was thorough. Division intelligence estimates of the defending forces likely to be found there ran to only two battalions of infantry, one or two of field artillery, up to two companies of tanks, and a military police battalion—all Italian. The enemy troops at Gafsa could summon reinforcements from El Guettar (one infantry battalion), and from the stations along the railroad to Maknassy, or from the Faïd area. Within one day, troops from as far away as Gabès could be brought to Gafsa, provided they were not needed for the impending Mareth battle. But the enemy garrison at Gafsa was expected only to delay the American advance and then to fall back to prepared positions in the mountains either toward Gabès or toward Maknassy. No enemy counterattack was deemed likely unless the Mareth Position was abandoned.[15] Indeed, road traffic observed just before the day of the attack indicated that most of the Gafsa force had already withdrawn.[16]

Following a half hour's air bombardment, regimental combat teams of the 16th (Col. d'Alary Fechet) and 18th Infantry (Col. Frank U. Greer) and one reinforced battalion of the 26th Infantry (Col. George A. Taylor) were to make the assault. Five complete battalions of field artillery and one battalion of antiaircraft artillery were to be employed. The 1st Ranger Battalion would be ready, after first supporting the east flank, to reconnoiter to El Guettar and to seize an area from which, subsequently, Combat Team 26 might attack beyond that village. Following the assault, the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion was to be ready to intervene south of Gafsa against any enemy mechanized forces that might arrive there next day. The 1st Armored Division would hold one combat command of three battalions ready to furnish support from the Station de Zannouch area. Participation by the 13th Field Artillery Brigade and by the 1st Battalion, 213th Coast Artillery (AA), was to be under corps control.[17]

In preparation for the attack the 1st Infantry Division made an approach march of about forty-five miles during the night of 16–17 March, one that was executed speedily and on a close schedule. The attacking elements detrucked north of the Gafsa area before daylight. The artillery was ready to support an assault at 0800, but the infantry was held back until 1000, despite the enemy's visible retreat, to await a scheduled preparatory air bombardment. By noon, 17

[14] (1) II Corps AAR, 10 Apr 43. (2) 1st Div G–3 Rpt, 15 Jan–8 Apr 43, pp. 7–8. (3) 18 A Gp Sitrep 139, 16 Mar 43, AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

[15] 1st Inf Div G–2 Est, 10 Mar 43.

[16] 18th Inf FO 14, 13 Mar 43, Intell Annex.

[17] 1st Div FO 16, 11 Mar 43.

March, the 18th Infantry had reached the eastern edge of Gafsa; shortly thereafter Company I, 16th Infantry, was leading the 3d Battalion, 16th Infantry, into the village from the northwest; and the 3d Battalion, 26th Infantry (reinforced), was near the western limit. They had overrun enemy security detachments and although mines and booby traps were plentiful, they found Gafsa to be free of defenders. While 1st Armored Division reconnaissance entered Station de Zannouch northeast of Gafsa on the route to Maknassy, reconnaissance and outpost forces of the 1st Infantry Division continued toward El Guettar and Djebel Mdilla. At Mdilla they made contact with some French troops, after initially mistaking them for an enemy group. The seizure of Gafsa was an encouraging exercise rather than a hard battle like those in which the 1st Infantry Division was later to earn fame. During 18–19 March, a period marked by drenching rainstorms, the entire division occupied the place and organized for defense against counterattack or air bombardment. At the same time the 1st Ranger Battalion occupied El Guettar on 18 March and sent patrols to establish contact with the enemy who was holding prepared defense positions behind the Keddab wadi.[18]

The Seizure of Station de Sened

The situation at Gafsa justified General Patton on 18 March in concluding that the second phase of the II Corps' attack could be undertaken next day. While the 1st Infantry Division organized Gafsa strongly for defense, the 1st Armored Division (reinforced) could be committed to the seizure of Station de Sened. The bulk of General Ward's division was already in areas selected with a view both to defense against incursion from the northeast and to the concentration needed to attack Station de Sened. Although some elements, and in particular Benson's armored task force directly under II Corps control, were in the vicinity of Sbeïtla, and Combat Command B (Robinett) was near Bir el Hafey, Combat Command A (McQuillin) was in the Zannouch area and Combat Command C (Stack) with the 60th Combat Team (de Rohan) were southeast of Djebel Souinia. It was General Ward's intention to bring Combat Command A northeastward along the railroad line from Gafsa toward Station de Sened in conjunction with an approach by Combat Command C and Combat Team 60 over hills north of the objective. But if the military situation near Gafsa permitted an immediate start of the second undertaking, the weather made postponement unavoidable. Much against his wishes, General Patton was forced to accept the fact that the mud had made an armored attack on 19 March out of the question.[19]

Streams were full to overflowing. The

[18] (1) 1st Div AAR, 11 Nov–14 Apr 43, including 1st Div Arty Rpt of Opns, 4 Mar–8 Apr 43; 16th, 18th, and 26th Inf AAR's. (2) Entry 319, 17 Mar 43, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (3) 1st Ranger Bn AAR, 14 Mar 43. (4) AFHQ G–3 Rpt, 18 Mar 43.

[19] (1) II Corps AAR, 10 Apr 43. (2) Patton Diary, 19 Mar 43. (3) Msg, Entry 181, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. This message reports the presence at Sbeïtla at 1930, 14 March, of the following units of the 1st Armored Division: the 3d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment (mediums); the 68th Field Artillery Battalion; Company A, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion; Company C, 16th Armored Engineers (C). By an agreement between Generals Ward and Eddy, the 84th Field Artillery Battalion was to remain at Sbeïtla. The 3d Battalion, 47th Infantry (9th Division), was already there. The 81st Reconnaissance Battalion moved to the area east and southeast of Sbeïtla.

earth was soggy and in many places there were extensive shallow pools. Bivouac areas were flooded. The soft roads were quickly cut into deep ruts by heavy trucks or churned into a viscous blanket by tank tracks. Travel cross-country became impossible for wheeled vehicles. Indeed, to assist them in reaching the roads from their parks required extraordinary effort and much extra time. The weather's one compensation was the fact that it restrained enemy air activity.[20]

While most of the 1st Armored Division remained immobilized on 19 March, Patton drove through the downpour to review the situation with Ward and Robinett. He was enthusiastic and confident, concerned only that the enemy should not be given opportunity for a spoiling attack while the Americans waited for conditions to be wholly satisfactory. He would have preferred to have the attack on Station de Sened made by as much infantry and artillery as could be moved on tracked vehicles rather than to wait for full co-ordination between the elements approaching Station de Sened from the north and McQuillin's armored force from Zannouch. Ward's orders for the attack to be made early on 20 March were issued to McQuillin, de Rohan, and Stack, while Robinett shifted his forces southwestward to the divisional assembly area, and Benson, under II Corps' control, took up the position north and east of Djebel el Hafey (682) thus vacated by Combat Command B.[21]

The plan of attack involved a march extremely taxing for de Rohan's combat team.[22] It was to climb the western slopes of Djebel Goussa to reach the dominating terraces along its southern face, which rises abruptly some 600 feet above the floor of the valley, in order to take the enemy's hill positions from the rear. From the heights, the attacking force could command the entrenched positions which the enemy had constructed on the flats below them near Station de Sened. At the same time, Combat Command C would be crossing a difficult series of ridges and shoulders at the southwestern extremity of the Djebel Madjoura (874) across a valley from Djebel Goussa, protecting the northeastern flank and giving fire support.[23] Its objective was the exit (three miles north of Station de Sened) from this valley to the broad Maknassy Valley. Working together, the 60th Combat Team and Stack's force would be able either to cut off the enemy force defending Station de Sened or to compel it to hasten its retreat in order to avoid encirclement. McQuillin's armored force, which would at the same time attack the enemy with infantry and artillery from the west, might be the beneficiary of the outflanking movement by Stack's and de Rohan's commands.

[20] Robinett, Among the First, MS, pp. 451–53. In private possession.

[21] (1) 1st Armd Div Opn Instruc 12, 19 Feb 43.

[22] Combat Team 60 (9th Infantry Division) then consisted of: the 60th Infantry Regiment; the 60th Field Artillery Battalion; Company C, 15th Engineers; Company C, 9th Medical Battalion; three platoons, 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion (SP); detachment, 9th Signal Company; Provisional Truck Company, Headquarters, 60th Infantry. 60th Inf Hist, 22 Mar–9 Apr 43, 5 Jul 43.

[23] (1) Combat Command C, 1st Armored Division, then consisted of the following: the 6th Armored Infantry (less the 2d and 3d Battalions); the 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment; the 68th Field Artillery Battalion; Company B, 16th Engineers. It was reinforced for later operations east of Maknassy by the 3d Battalion, 60th Infantry; the 58th Field Artillery Battalion; and Company B, 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion. (2) CCC 1st Armd Div AAR, 18 Apr 43. (3) 60th Inf Hist, 1943.

General Ward's plan for the seizure of Station de Sened worked in general as he had foreseen. The 60th Combat Team approached Djebel Goussa during the night of 19–20 March and throughout the next day pushed to the heights while Combat Command C, 1st Armored Division, was gaining its objective somewhat earlier and holding positions from which to support Combat Team 60, if necessary. By evening of the same day Combat Command A had struggled from Zannouch to a mine field west of Station de Sened. The enemy was driven out by artillery fire, some fleeing northeastward at dawn of 21 March into the path of Combat Command C, which took seventy-nine prisoners and two 47-mm. guns after a brief engagement. Another part of the garrison took refuge at Sened village, where it finally surrendered on 23 March to Company G, 60th Infantry, supported by elements of the 91st Field Artillery Battalion. A few escaped from Sened to Sakket on the other side of the mountains only to be captured there by troops of the 1st Infantry Division. Station de Sened had thus been taken on 21 March by maneuver rather than by storm, and without the losses normally to be expected in a frontal attack. But the exertion left the infantry, particularly of the 60th Combat Team, too tired to begin another attack effectively.[24]

The Advance Beyond Maknassy

The capture of Gafsa and Station de Sened left only a demonstration to be made toward Maknassy, twenty miles farther east in order to complete execution of 18 Army Group's original instructions to II Corps. But those instructions had already been changed. On 19 March, Patton returned to his headquarters in Fériana after his rain-drenched visit to the headquarters of the 1st Armored Division to find General McCreery, Chief of Staff, 18 Army Group, with General Alexander's new plans and orders for II Corps. The Corps was now to seize the high ground east of Maknassy and to send a light armored raiding party to the Mezzouna airfields to destroy enemy installations there. No large forces, however, were to pass beyond a line extending from Gafsa through Maknassy heights, Faïd, and Fondouk el Aouareb. Later, after the British Eighth Army had passed up the coast beyond Maknassy, the II Corps was to be reduced by the transfer of its U.S. 9th Infantry Division to relieve the British 46th Division on the far northern flank and to operate under British 5 Corps within British First Army. The 34th Infantry Division would at about the same time sideslip to the north in order to attack Fondouk el Aouareb gap along the axis Maktar–Pichon. It thus appeared that after the enemy had moved north of Fondouk el Aouareb, the II Corps would be faced with the ignominious prospect of being pinched out of the Allied line. These instructions would not only prohibit any American advance to the sea but would confine the role of II Corps to merely threatening the enemy's western flank without ever actually attempting to cut him off; they would also prevent the corps, except for 9th Infantry Division, from participating in the last stage of the campaign. In accordance with orders, the II Corps sent attacking forces not only to Maknassy but to a defile east of El Guettar, on the southern side of Djebel Orbata, the purpose being to draw off en-

[24] (1) II Corps AAR, 10 Apr 43. (2) CCC 1st Armd Div AAR, 18 Apr 43. (3) 60th Inf Hist, 1943.



RAILROAD STATION AT MAKNASSY. *1st Armored Division men taking a break after discovering that Maknassy was free of the enemy.*

emy troops which might otherwise strengthen the defense of the Mareth Position. There the main attack was to begin, it will be remembered, on the night of 20–21 March.

On 21 March General Patton drove to General McQuillin's command post in order to hurry Combat Command A to a hill mass five miles northeast of Station de Sened which appeared to the corps commander a possible place of advantage which must be denied to Maknassy's defenders. At the same time, Combat Command C moved northeastward, along a camel trail, and then swung south to reach the main route from Station de Sened to Maknassy at a point about halfway between the two places. For a stretch, Combat Command B followed, but instead of turning south, continued eastward in the valley to an area from which to guard the northern flank of the attack on Maknassy, and assist in preparatory artillery fire on the village. The exhausted troops of the 60th Combat Team, meanwhile, assembled just north of Sened station.[25]

Advance elements of Combat Command C, 1st Armored Division, approached Mak-

[25](1) Patton Diary, 21 Mar 43. (2) CCC 1st Armd Div AAR, 18 Apr 43. (3) 60th Inf Hist, 1943. (4) Robinett, Among the First, p. 455.

nassy before midnight and subjected the place to an interdictory shelling, hoping to discourage the enemy from laying mines and booby traps before withdrawing. Colonel Stack received reinforcements during the night and disposed these troops for the approaching action. Not until 0715 next morning did reconnaissance discover that Maknassy was free of the enemy, whom some of the inhabitants declared to have withdrawn onto the hills near the road to Mezzouna, east of the village.[26]

General Ward was then faced with a critical choice. He could attempt to occupy the hills five miles east of Maknassy in a daylight attack without waiting to reorganize or to prepare for stiff resistance. Enemy aviation could strike from airfields only a few minutes away, as it had during the battles along the Medjerda river in November and December. If General Ward waited until fully ready, the enemy might be able to strengthen his hold on the hill position controlling the exit from the Maknassy to the Mezzouna side of the mountains, so that the effort to dislodge him would be difficult and costly. The incentive to take great risks was slight, because of the orders the Americans were then operating under to threaten the Axis line of communications but not to commit any large force beyond the hills. Ward decided to make a deliberate, soundly organized attack. Although there is a certain amount of inconclusive evidence that this choice was approved at the time by General Patton, the stronger evidence is to the contrary, and Patton was later to conclude that the choice had been founded upon considerations which were unduly defensive in character, and to condemn himself for not having gone forward that day to urge on the advance.[27]

18 Army Group Revises II Corps Mission, 22 March

At this point, the role of the II Corps was again modified. On 21 March General Montgomery, when he recognized that the Eighth Army would be engaged for several days in trying to breach the main Mareth Position near the coast, and before he decided to shift the principal effort to the El Hamma gap, suggested to General Alexander that the U.S. II Corps could be of substantial assistance by a strong armored thrust through Maknassy to cut the Sfax–Gabès road. At 18 Army Group, such a project was considered to be too ambitious, particularly in view of the likelihood that the *10th Panzer Division* would intervene during its execution. But General Alexander issued instructions to II Corps on 22 March to prepare for a possible effort to disrupt the enemy's line of communications and destroy his supply dumps southwest of Maharès. General Patton was to make ready a strong mobile column for such a mission. Meanwhile, the limited missions of the 1st Armored Division east of Maknassy and of the 1st Infantry Division east of El Guettar remained unchanged. Only the tempo was

[26] CCC 1st Armd Div AAR, 18 Apr 43.

[27] (1) Gen. Jean Bouley, then lieutenant colonel and liaison officer with the 1st Armored Division, stated from memory on 1 August 1949 to General Robinett that Patton had approved the decision not to attack until after dark, during a roadside conference with Ward just west of Maknassy after the village had been taken. Memo of conv, Robinett with Bouley, Rastatt, Germany, 1 Aug 49. OCMH. (2) Patton sent his chief of staff, General Gaffey, to be with General Ward on 22 March but did not go there himself. He thought the 1st Armored Division had "dawdled." Patton Diary, 22 Mar 43. (3) Entry 106, 22 Mar 43, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

accelerated somewhat.[28] That afternoon General Patton gave oral instructions to General Ward to seize the heights from Meheri Zebbeus, north of Maknassy, to Djebel Bou Douaou, southeast of it; to organize and occupy that ground; to send a light mobile armored force to raid the Mezzouna airfields; and, in addition, to prepare a second armored force and keep it in readiness to harry the enemy's lines of communications in the vicinity of Maharès, more than fifty miles east of Maknassy on the coast. Patton directed that the attack be made that night.[29]

The enemy had already recognized the operations by Eighth Army and U.S. II Corps as concentric attacks upon General Messe's *First Italian Army*. Kesselring decided to commit the reserves of the *Fifth Panzer Army* in holding the heights east of Maknassy and to release the *10th Panzer Division* from *Army Group Africa* reserve, for a counterattack toward Gafsa under the control of General Cramer's *Headquarters, German Africa Corps*.[30]

Colonel Dickson, G–2, II Corps, correctly concluded on 22 March that an attack by the *10th Panzer Division* was imminent, either at Maknassy or El Guettar, and General Patton acted accordingly.[31]

The day's reconnaissance on 22 March confirmed the reports by inhabitants of Maknassy village that the enemy had retreated into the hills, or beyond. The main ridges of the Eastern Dorsal at this southeastern extremity are in the pattern of a large figure 5, with Maknassy directly south of the vertical stem and about five miles from the heights which form the curving section. Djebel Zebbeus (451) and Djebel Djebs No. 1 (369) are north of Maknassy. Djebel Dribica (209), Djebel Naemia (322), Djebel Bou Douaou (1753), and Djebel Bou Hedma (790) form the semicircle, with the latter's long ridges extending far to the southwest of Maknassy. Between Djebel Djebs No. 1 and Djebel Dribica, the Leben wadi, crossed by a railroad and by a highway bridge north of the village, drains from the Maknassy plain to the coastal flats. With its tributaries, the Leben wadi forms a lengthy tank obstacle north and northwest of Maknassy. Djebel Dribica leads southeasterly to Hill 322 on Djebel Naemia, with which it is connected by an L-shaped ridge. The road and the railroad from Maknassy to Mezzouna and Maharès run side by side over the southern shoulder of Djebel Naemia, except for a distance of nearly two miles through an opening between Hill 322 and a second Djebel Djebs, where the railroad loops less than a mile south of the road. This Djebel Djebs No. 2 (312) rises east of a broader gap between Hill 322 and Djebel Bou Douaou, like a stopper barely removed from a bottle, and is admirably situated to control movement through the defiles northwest or southwest of it. Djebel Bou Douaou and Djebel Bou Hedma extend south and west with crests somewhat higher than Maknassy's other neighboring hills and with good observation of the "Gumtree road" running along their southern bases from El Guettar to Maharès.

Combat Command B's reconnaissance observed a few groups of enemy vehicles pulling back through the gaps northeast of

[28] Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[29] Memo, Col Lambert for CG 1st Armd Div, 23 Mar 43, Entry 163, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. This confirms oral instructions of the previous day.

[30] Daily Rpt, *Comando Supremo* to *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt*, 21 Mar 43, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt, Meldungen des Ob Sued, v.1 .III.–30 .IV .43. Band I.*

[31] 18 A Gp Appreciation, 1800, 17 Mar 43. This anticipated an enemy armored counterstroke either via Maknassy or Faïd. AFHQ CofS Cable Log.



BRIG. GEN. PAUL M. ROBINETT *(facing camera), Commander of Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, on reconnaissance, Maknassy valley.*

Maknassy, and drew artillery fire from the vicinity of Meheri Zebbeus; but along the route of the road and railroad, the enemy kept out of sight.

Enemy Defense of Maknassy Pass, 23–25 March

At 1415 on 22 March General Ward issued written orders for an assault at 2330 that night.[32] He specified that Colonel Stack's forces should attack Djebel Dribica and Hill 322 north of the pass and Djebel Djebs (2), beyond and southeast of it, while Combat Team 60 (−) simultaneously gained control of Djebel Bou Douaou. He directed Combat Command B (General Robinett) to protect the northern flank in the vicinity of Djebel Zebbeus and the upper reaches of the Leben wadi. Of the two bare and rocky hills north of the pass, Djebel Dribica seemed the more imposing obstacle and was assigned to the more experienced 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry (Colonel Kern), while Hill 322 on Djebel Naemia was to be taken by the 3d Battalion, 60th Infantry (Lt. Col. John J. Toffey, Jr.), attached to Combat Command C. This battalion was still weary from climbing Djebel Goussa near Station de Sened, and from

[32] 1st Armd Div FO 10, 22 Mar 43.

trying for most of the day to work through traffic-clogged roads to the assembly area after a night move toward Maknassy.[33]

The attack beyond Maknassy was too late and too weak. The two battalions under Colonel de Rohan, to be sure, met no opposition in securing Djebel Bou Douaou, and next morning were ordered to occupy the area north of it as far as the road and railroad, and to assist by fire the southern wing of Combat Command C. On the northern flank after a three-battalion artillery preparation of thirty minutes duration, the 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, took Djebel Dribica in competent fashion against only light opposition. But the 3d Battalion, 60th Infantry, found that Djebel Naemia, with Hill 322 in the center, was by far the most strongly defended area. A mine field barred the approach to the crest, and was covered by concentrated fire from well-placed machine guns both on the hill ahead and on adjacent slopes to the right and left. One company commander was killed. The battalion commander went forward to reconnoiter and was pinned down. The attack stopped. The men dug in to wait for daylight.

Next morning, 23 March, the 3d Battalion, 60th Infantry, pressed forward again. This time the attack was supported by the 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, and by fire from the remainder of Combat Team 60, across the road. Just as the enemy was beginning to fall back in the belief that the Americans were breaking through, Colonel Lang reached the battlefield and was able to make the small German force hold on until the first reinforcements arrived. At about the same time, on the Allied side, Colonel Toffey was wounded. The German force that held the vital Hill 322 was Rommel's former personal guard. At the time of the imminent break-through it had been reduced to only eighty infantrymen.[34] At another critical juncture the covering fire of a few tanks aided the enemy to occupy positions along the eastern edge of Djebel Dribica. Hill 322, dominating the pass, remained the objective of a succession of American attacks that evening, including one supported by four artillery battalions. Success seemed so likely that routes were reconnoitered for a light armored force preparing to raid the Mezzouna airfields during the night of 23–24 March.[35]

After the first attacks were stalled on Hill 322, a stronger force concentrated for an assault at 0700, 24 March. Three battalions of infantry, supported by two companies of tanks and four battalions of artillery, plus some 75-mm. tank destroyers, attacked the defenders from the north, west, and south. The 3d Battalion, 60th Infantry, on the west, and the 3d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry (less Company I), on the south, received direct supporting fire from a company of medium tanks, while the 1st Battalion plus companies G and I, 6th Armored Infantry, was protected by others on its eastern flank as it attacked along the ridges from the north.[36] Throughout the night the enemy had been digging in while small

[33] (1) CCC 1st Armd Div AAR, 18 Apr 43. (2) 60th Inf Hist, 1943.

[34] The reinforcements hastily thrown into the threatened sector were elements of *Kampfgruppe Lang* (Col. Lang, commanding officer of the *69th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, 10th Panzer Division*). These German units were nominally under General Imperiali's *50th Special Brigade*. See *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB*, 23 Mar 43, and MS # D–166 (Lang), Part II.

[35] 1st Armd Div Sitrep, 1100, 23 Mar 43. About 700 prisoners of war, mostly Italians, were reported.

[36] Rpt, 1st Armd Div to G–3 II Corps, 0855, 24 Mar 43, Entry 197, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

groups of reinforcements built up his total number to an estimated 350.[37] The Americans, their difficulties greatly increased because of the enemy's excellent air-ground co-operation, were unable to dislodge these troops after hard ground fighting.[38]

Continued failure to gain Hill 322 threatened to frustrate that part of the mission assigned to II Corps which appealed most to General Patton. He had protested to General Eisenhower the prohibition on American advance beyond Fondouk el Aouareb.[39] He probably counted on the raiding party from Maknassy to Mezzouna to demonstrate that if such an advance were authorized, it could lead to even bigger successes, and for that reason had instructed General Ward to prepare for an as yet unauthorized aggressive action in the area near Maharès. He returned from the greatly extended 1st Infantry Division, where he had spent much of 24 March, to discover that Ward's attack on the narrower front east of Maknassy was still unsuccessful. The tanks had thrown their tracks on the rough and rocky ground and had been of minor service. The infantry had lacked the impetus to carry the attack through to success. One estimate of the time still needed to get the pass was twenty-four hours.[40] The enemy was described as "obviously moving to concentrate" on the 1st Armored Division's front and as stepping up the pace of his frequent air attacks. General Ward made a request for "all available air cover for our troops moving up now, and for active reconnaissance, and strafing of the enemy moving up on our front this p. m. and tomorrow."[41] Calling General Ward to the telephone, General Patton ordered him personally to lead an attack next morning which had to succeed.[42] The orders were partially carried out, for the division commander did lead an attack by three battalions of the 6th Armored Infantry, which began without artillery preparation, and won a brief success. But they could not hold the hill under heavy fire from German mortars, machine guns, and artillery. By noon, 25 March, General Ward decided that he must suspend the attack while the troops recovered from near exhaustion and reorganized.[43] In view of the enemy's decision to concentrate mobile armored elements against the weakening American forces of the 1st Infantry Divi-

[37] (1) *Kampfgruppe Lang,* sent to this area by *Fifth Panzer Army* on 22 March 1943, began arriving next day, and by 26 March consisted of: *Regimental Staff* and *1st Battalion, 69th Panzer Grenadier Regiment; 1st Battalion, 86th Panzer Grenadier Regiment; 26th Africa Battalion;* nine Mark VI plus fifteen Mark III and IV tanks of *501st Panzer Battalion; 580th Reconnaissance Battalion;* about thirty men from *Kasta O. B. (Rommel)* and one company of Kesselring's headquarters guards, and of artillery, *9th Battery, 90th Artillery Regiment;* one battery of Italian 105's; two batteries of 210-mm. mortars supported by one 170-mm. gun; two batteries of 88-mm. dual-purpose Flak guns; and one platoon of 20-mm. antiaircraft guns. Hq, *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB,* 26 Mar 43. MS # D–166 (Lang), Part II. (2) Lang was correctly identified and his units ascertained in the 18 Army Group Appreciation, 2000, 25 March 1943. (3) *Kampfgruppe Lang* passed to the command of *Headquarters, DAK* (Cramer), on 28 March 1943.

[38] Rpt, 1st Armd Div to II Corps, 1420, 24 Mar 43, Entry 211, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[39] (1) Patton Diary, 22 March 1943, says that he sent General Bradley to Algiers on this mission. (2) Bradley, *A Soldier's Story,* pp. 56–58, says that Bradley obtained Patton's permission to go.

[40] (1) Phone Conv, Akers and Curtis, 1905, 25 Mar 43, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) CCC 1st Armd Div AAR, 19 Apr 43.

[41] Rpt, 1st Armd Div to II Corps, 1420, 24 Mar 43, Entry 211, in II Corps, G–3 Jnl.

[42] (1) Patton Diary, 24 Mar 43. (2) Gen Ward Personal Diary, 24 Mar 43. In private possession.

[43] (1) Msg, CG 1st Armd Div to CO 6th Inf, 1200, 25 Mar 43, Entry 352, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) Patton Diary, 24 Mar 43. Colonel Kern was severely wounded on 24 March and General Ward slightly injured on 25 March.

sion east of El Guettar, II Corps ordered a provisional armored protecting force under Colonel Benson to be shifted to the vicinity of Gafsa.[44] The initiative at Maknassy was allowed to pass to the enemy while the situation east of El Guettar was being corrected.

The 1st Infantry Division Holds the Enemy Near El Guettar

The 1st Infantry Division's part in the operations specified by 18 Army Group's instructions of 19 March was an attack east of El Guettar along the Gumtree road south of the Gafsa–Mezzouna mountains, to be launched after the 1st Armored Division had neutralized Station de Sened. This drive easterly from El Guettar was to be made down the great valley on a front which furnished a severe test of tactical efficiency and which broadened beyond the capacities of a single infantry division to defend or control.

From Gafsa to El Guettar, the road curves around the southwestern portion of Djebel Orbata (1165) and runs along its southern base past the Chott el Guettar to a road fork some twelve miles distant from Gafsa. At this fork, the road to Gabès branches off to the southeast, passing between the Djebel Berda (926) complex on the south and jumbled hills at the north which rise to the horseshoe-shaped Djebel el Mcheltat (482). The other branch, Gumtree road, continues along the southern base of Djebel Orbata and the ridge of which it is a part, and strikes across the coastal plain north of the Sebkret en Noual to Maharès on the sea coast. Three miles east of the El Guettar road fork, the Gumtree road enters a long narrow defile between a spur of the Djebel Orbata and the Djebel el Ank (621). Near the eastern end of the defile are the village of Bou Hamran and the junction with a track which leads through the mountain hamlet of Sakket and over the ridge to the village of Sened.

The 1st Infantry Division was expected to capture the defile at Djebel el Ank and to press eastward along the Gumtree road. It could not advance very far without becoming vulnerable to an attack up the road from Gabès on the southern side of Djebel el Mcheltat, an attack which could strike the division on the flank and either cut it off from Gafsa or force a withdrawal. The road to Gabès was connected with the Gumtree road by a dirt road through El Hafay at the northeastern end of Djebel Chemsi (790) some twenty-five miles east of El Guettar. A force from either Gabès or from a point much farther north could therefore approach El Guettar from the southeast, via the Gumtree road and its El Hafay connection with the Gabès–Gafsa road. The *10th Panzer Division*, once it had assembled, could strike either at Maknassy or toward El Guettar and, if the latter, then by either the Gabès road or the Djebel el Ank defile.

After a day of reconnaissance, observation, and preparations, the 1st Infantry Division opened its attack on the night of 20–21 March. To capture the defile on the road to Maharès, the 1st Ranger Battalion was sent on a circuitous and difficult ten-mile detour over the shoulders of Djebel Orbata which brought it back to the road at a point east of the Italian defenders for a surprise attack from the north.[45] At the

[44] (1) Msg, Col Akers to Col Benson, 2000, 21 Mar 43, Entry 56, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) II Corps AAR, 24–25 Mar 43, 10 Apr 43. The provisional force consisted of a battalion of medium tanks, a battalion of artillery, and a battalion of infantry.

[45] 1st Ranger Bn AAR, 14 Mar–10 Apr 43, 9 Apr 43.

same time, the 26th Infantry, aided by artillery preparation and the cover afforded by foothills and great rocks, pushed straight along the road, closing in to gain a complete victory. The Americans took over 700 prisoners and after converting captured positions for defense toward the east, continued the attack in order to gain control over all of Djebel el Ank before going on to Bou Hamran.[46]

The 18th Infantry's attack moved southeastward along the road from El Guettar to Gabès and into the adjacent hills against elements of *Division Centauro*. At night, and under a hazy moon, the infantry crossed a plain where mere six-inch grass was the main cover, and where the enemy had already demonstrated that his observation in daylight was alert and accurate, and his artillery fire swift and precise. Getting through a mine field, the troops infiltrated past Hill 336 north of the road to take it at daybreak with a rush from the rear. General Patton and some of his staff visited the hill soon afterward. The first stage of the attack "according to plan" yielded 415 prisoners. During the remainder of 21 March, the 18th Infantry, limited by the enemy's rapid laying of artillery fire on moving men, and by very active air strafing and dive bombing, particularly of command posts and artillery positions, strove to press through foothills onto the Djebel el Mcheltat. Battery A of the 33d Field Artillery Battalion lost two 105's and two vehicles in a direct hit. At noon, 21 March, the divisional objective was established as a line from a crest three miles northeast of Bou Hamran to a point about fourteen miles to the southeast of El Guettar, a road junction east of Djebel el Kheroua (369). Casualties by nightfall were fourteen killed and forty-one wounded.[47]

The Americans during the next day consolidated their gains east of El Guettar, for the Italians made no resolute counterattack and were driven off by artillery fire and Allied air action whenever their guns opened up or small groups of their tanks assembled. American advance was not as rapid as had been expected. The troops improved their positions along the Gumtree road by having the 26th Infantry probe east of Bou Hamran. The 16th Infantry occupied the western foothills of the Djebel el Mcheltat, and two battalions of the 18th Infantry occupied heights south of the Gabès road, at the northeastern tip of Djebel Berda. Contact with the enemy in this area late in the day (22 March) promised action of about the same tempo for the following morning.[48]

The operations by II Corps had been so well correlated with attacks by British Eighth Army as to make 22 March a critical day for the enemy. The seizure of Gafsa on 17 March had coincided with initial British exploratory attacks in the Mareth coastal sector. The capture of Station de Sened on 20–21 March had occurred while British 30 Corps began trying to punch through the Mareth Line and when the

[46] 26th Inf AAR, 11 Nov 42–14 Apr 43, 19 Apr 43.

[47] (1) 1st Div G–3 Periodic Rpt, 21 Mar 43; 1st Div G–3 Rpt, 15 Jan–8 Apr 43, 17 Apr 43, p. 9. (2) Maj Sam Carter, The Operations of the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry (1st Division), at El Guettar, Tunisia, 17 March–25 March 1943, MS. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga., 1947–48. (3) 18th Inf S–3 Jnl, 21 Mar 43. (4) Capt Herbert A. Smith, The Operations of the 3d Battalion, 18th Infantry (1st Division), at El Guettar, Tunisia, MS. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga., 1947–48. (5) 26th Inf AAR, 11 Nov 42–14 Apr 43, 19 Apr 43. (6) Phone Conv, Col Gibb with Col Akers, 1435 21 Mar 43, Enry 34, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[48] 1st Div G–3 Periodic Rpt, 22 Mar 43.



INFANTRYMEN NEAR EL GUETTAR *occupying the heights south of the Gabès road.*

New Zealand Corps was about to seize Hill 201 south of El Hamma. By the time the 1st Armored Division reached Maknassy on 22 March and the 1st Infantry Division pushed beyond El Guettar, the enemy was committing some of his reserves near Mareth and sending others to the El Hamma gap. He had only one mobile division available with which to try to check the American approach to the Gabès area, the *10th Panzer Division* (–) (Gen. Fritz von Broich).

On 21 March, as noted, *Army Group Africa* released the *10th Panzer Division* to the *German Africa Corps* for employment in a counterattack toward Gafsa. It was not apparent to the Allies where this attack would be made, although they were aware that it was building up. Actually, the German force assembled during the night of 22–23 March near Djebel Ben Kheïr (587, east of El Hafay). At 0300 the *10th Panzer Division* attacked along the axis of the Gabès–Gafsa road to push northwestward

against the southern flank and perhaps the rear of the 1st Infantry Division before daylight.[49]

Reinforced American Infantry Versus German Armor, 23 March

General Allen that night had the 26th Combat Team advancing along the Gumtree road, while the 1st and 2d Battalions, 18th Infantry, were engaged, as they had been since the preceding afternoon, in driving out Italian forces northeast of Hill 772 on Djebel Berda, thus widening the front considerably. The trains of the 2d Battalion, 18th Infantry, barely reached the cover of the foothills, after crossing in darkness from the northern side of the valley, when sounds of motors to the northeast were followed by an eruption of tracer fire and the echoing rumble of guns. At 0500, while darkness was still complete, an enemy motorized force was reconnoitering by fire the southern slopes of Djebel el Mcheltat.

Daylight revealed the presence of the *10th Panzer Division,* which was methodically sweeping the foothills and the lower ground north of the road before undertaking bolder measures. The 3d Battalions of both the 18th and 16th Infantry were under direct attack. A spearhead moving up the valley was engaged by the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion until about 0700. The main body of the enemy force was in full view of American observers on heights above the valley on either side, and from the *German Africa Corps'* command post on Hill 369.[50]

At first the battle ran entirely in favor of the attacking Germans despite determined and courageous opposition. Their tanks and self-propelled guns, interspersed with infantry in carriers, rolled westward in a hollow square formation and at a slow but steady pace. Behind them, a column of trucks drove to a predetermined point at the western end of Djebel el Mcheltat and unloaded more infantry, which followed closely the armored rectangle ahead of them. Then the mass of the enemy separated into three prongs. One group turned northwest among the foothills east of Hill 336 overrunning the 32d Field Artillery and part of the 5th Field Artillery Battalions; another continued along the road; and the third, and much the largest, force tried to sweep the hills and northward along the edge of the Chott el Guettar.

German tank-infantry teams overran the American artillery and infantry positions east of Hill 336 in engagements which brought some hand-to-hand encounter, and heavy American losses. A curving belt of mines extended from Chott el Guettar across the road and along the Keddab wadi to the southeastern base of Hill 336. There the tide of battle changed.[51] American artillery and the tank destroyers of the 601st and 899th Tank Destroyer Battalions knocked out nearly thirty enemy tanks, and the mine field stopped eight more.[52] Eventually, the morning attack was contained. The *10th Panzer*

[49] Morning and Daily Rpt, 23 Mar 43, *OB SOUTH* to *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt,* in *Meldungen des Ob Sued, v. 1.III.–30.IV .43, Band I.*

[50] (1) Carter's account cited n. 47(2), above. This is based on observation from a point of vantage, and is relied upon for several details. (2) *Kampfstaffel DAK, KTB, 1.I.–12.IV.43,* 23 Mar 43.

[51] This mine belt was partly completed on the night of 21–22 March 1943. Msg, 1st Lt. J. W. Oxford, Jr., Co B 1st Engr Bn (C), to CO 18th CT, 0335, 22 Mar 43, in 18th Inf Jnl and Opns Rpt, 11 Nov 42–14 Apr 43.

[52] The 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion lost twenty-four guns, of which two were recoverable, and had only nine others after this action. The 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion lost seven tank destroyers (M10's). Memo, Col Hewitt for CG II Corps, 23 Mar 43, Entry 166, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.



U. S. ARMOR NEAR EL GUETTAR, *23 March 1943. In foreground is a radio-equipped half-track personnel carrier. A 75-mm. gun motor carriage M3 can be seen in the background.*

Division pulled back a few miles to the east and prepared for a second attack. During this withdrawal enemy artillery and aviation harassed the American defenders, and Allied air units struck back repeatedly. The Germans towed their disabled tanks to a prepared maintenance point not far from where their infantry had first detrucked. During this interlude, and running a gantlet of enemy shells and Stukas, nineteen American jeeps rushed back for ammunition, all but six returning safely in time to oppose the next assault.[53] Elements of the 16th Infantry and the 1st Ranger Battalion were put into the line along the Keddab wadi. Headquarters, 1st Division, was ready for the second attack (1645 hours) and aware of the enemy forces to be committed.[54]

Preceded by a German air strike, and on the signal of a siren, the ground troops of the enemy attacked once more toward El Guettar. At 1830, word came that they were still advancing, with thirty-eight tanks in one group, but barely fifteen minutes later, an exultant report arrived from the 18th Combat Team:

Enemy attacked as scheduled, preceded by dive-bombers which did little damage. Troops started to appear from all directions, mostly from tanks. Hit Anti-Tank Company and 3rd Battalion. Our artillery crucified them with high explosive shells and they were falling like flies. Tanks seem to be moving to the rear; those that could move. 1st Ranger Battalion is moving to protect the flank of the 3rd Battalion, which was practically surrounded. The 3rd Battalion and the Rangers drove them off and the 1st Battalion crucified them.[55]

Thus at the close of 23 March, a reinforced American infantry division, well supported by Allied aviation, mainly by their artillery had stopped the bulk of an enemy armored division.[56] Kesselring's report to the OKW acknowledged substantial tank losses in the morning attack at the Keddab wadi; it called the efforts of the 601st and 899th Tank Battalions a counterattack with tanks against the German north wing which had been repulsed, and it attributed the failure of the afternoon attack to superior Allied forces and a threatened penetration through the Italian-held positions on the northern edge of Djebel Berda.[57] Although the armored counterattacks of 23 March were beaten off, the enemy by no means lost his determination to maintain an aggressive defense of the routes of Allied approach to the rear of *Italian First Army*. He might not succeed in plunging through the Americans with his armor, but he held strong defensive positions and could nibble incessantly with infantry and artillery, and with tanks used as artillery, at the American positions in the hills north and south of the Gabès and Gumtree roads. On 24 March he made some progress in each sector, especially in the high ground on opposite sides of the Gabès road, and on 25 March, he succeeded in recapturing from the 1st and 2d Battalions, 18th Infantry, their most exposed position on one of the northeastern buttresses of Djebel

[53] Smith's account cited n. 47(4) above.

[54] (1) The enemy units were: *2d Battalion, 69th Panzer Grenadier Regiment; 2d Battalion, 86th Panzer Grenadier Regiment; 10th Motorcycle Battalion; 1st* and *2d Battalions, 7th Panzer Regiment;* and the *4th Battalion, 90th Artillery Regiment.* (2) 1st Div G-3 Rpt, 15 Jan–8 Apr 43, 17 Apr 43, p. 11.

[55] Rpt cited n. 54 (2) above.

[56] 18 A Gp Sitrep 151, 2359, 23 Mar 43. This cites 123 bomber sorties, including 2 Hurribomber attacks on tanks, motor transport, and bivouacs east of El Guettar, and continuous fighter sweeps. AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

[57] Intell Rpt, *Comando Supremo* to *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt*, 23 Mar 43, in *Meldungen des Ob Sued, v. 1.III.–30.IV.43, Band I.*



LOADING A 155-MM. HOWITZER *during the enemy counterattack east of El Guettar, 23 March 1943.*

Berda. When a German patrol reached the bare summit of Hill 772 there, mortar fire brought it scampering down. But the two battalions of the 18th Infantry, even with the 1st Ranger Battalion, managed only to hold their position; they could not extend it without larger reinforcements, perhaps another entire regiment. With that much strength, they believed that they could take all of Djebel Berda and the hills east of it, and thus open the road to Gabès for American armor. Had such a regiment been sent, or had the two battalions simply remained in possession, the Germans might not have been able to withstand the 9th Infantry Division's efforts later to drive them off. But during the night of 25–26 March the battalions were ordered to withdraw through the 1st Ranger Battalion. Colonel Darby's Rangers, with a purely defensive role, held a south flank position in the foothills west of Djebel Berda for the next two days.[58]

[58] (1) 1st Inf Div G–3 Rpt, 15 Jan–8 Apr 43, 17 Apr 43, p. 11. (2) 1st Ranger Bn AAR, 14 Mar–10 Apr 43, 9 Apr 43.

CHAPTER XXIX

II Corps Operations Beyond El Guettar

18 Army Group Again Revises the Plan for II Corps

By 25 March General Patton's operations had successfully drawn off one of the German armored divisions which otherwise might have opposed the British Eighth Army.[1] General Montgomery's attempt to circumvent the Mareth Position through the gap southwest of El Hamma was scheduled to enter a crucial phase on the night of 26–27 March. After the *First Italian Army* had been uprooted by this maneuver and driven in retreat to the Chott Position, the II Corps was expected to be of additional assistance if it could send an armored task force as far as the Chott Position and perhaps farther up the coast. In the meantime, by stepping up offensive action at all possible points along the Eastern Dorsal, it could pin down Axis forces at the time when success would bring fluidity to the battle near El Hamma. General Alexander accordingly brought to General Patton at noon, 25 March, a new directive for the II Corps. The corps base line was to be advanced from the Western Dorsal to extend between Gafsa and Sbeïtla. He released the U.S. 9th and 34th Infantry Divisions to II Corps for employment in current offensive operations. The 9th Division (less Combat Team 60) was to attack simultaneously with the 1st Infantry Division southeast of El Guettar. The 34th Division (less the 133d Combat Team) was to attack by itself the Axis-held gap through the Eastern Dorsal at Fondouk el Aouareb.

The II Corps was to abandon the attempt to use the pass east of Maknassy to move an armored column onto the coastal plain, southwest of Maharès, a plan which had been under consideration since 22 March. The U.S. 1st Armored Division would leave in the area a force containing a medium tank battalion, two artillery battalions, and the 60th Combat Team, and would assemble in concealment at least three other battalions of medium tanks ready for commitment in a mobile column thrusting southeastward toward Gabès from El Guettar.

Operations east of El Guettar would thus be on a much enlarged scale. The 26th Infantry's zone astride the Gumtree road would be stabilized while other elements of the 1st Infantry Division and the 9th Infantry Division together opened a gap between Djebel el Mcheltat (482) and Djebel el Kheroua (369), southeast of El Guettar, through which the armored column could proceed. The attack along the El

[1] The U.S. 1st Infantry Division reported casualties for the period 17–25 March, inclusive, as 51 killed, 309 wounded, and 57 missing. Entry 334, 26 Mar 43, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

Guettar–Gabès road would be executed in three phases: first, obtaining the road junction east of Djebel el Kheroua; second, securing a position as far forward as the road loop through El Hafay between Djebel Chemsi (790) and Djebel Ben Kheïr (587); and third, sending the U.S. 1st Armored Division to Djebel Tebaga Fatnassa (270), a hill on the western flank of the enemy's Chott Position, at a time to be determined by 18 Army Group, and with the mission of harassing the enemy's line of communications without incurring a major tank battle.[2]

In preparation for these operations ordered by 18 Army Group on 25 March, Patton directed General Ward to have General McQuillin defend the pass east of Maknassy with a much reduced force against the enemy's increasingly aggressive pressure, to send to Gafsa as secretly as possible the 81st Reconnaissance and 6th Field Artillery Battalions after dark on 28 March.[3] Until further orders from II Corps Ward was to hold at Maknassy the remainder of the 1st Armored Division not assigned to McQuillin.[4]

At the same time that the II Corps was attacking at Fondouk el Aouareb and strengthening and concentrating its thrust beyond El Guettar, the Southeast Algerian Command (Gen. Robert Boissau) at the right of II Corps was directed by 18 Army Group to press forward in the valley between Djebel Berda (926) and Djebel el Asker (625), to the south.

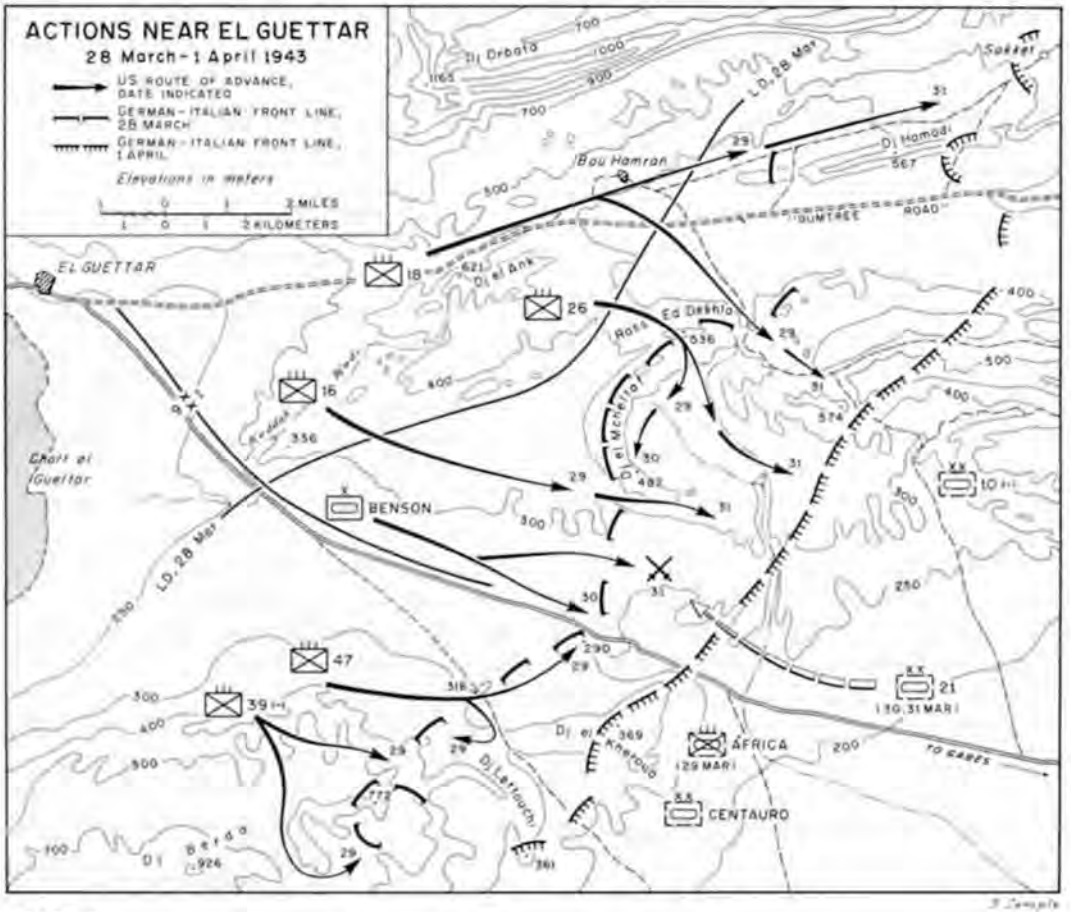
Two Divisions East of El Guettar, 28–29 March

The II Corps renewed its attack towards Gabès at 0600, 28 March, as the enemy farther southeast was occupying the Chott Position and abandoning the Mareth Line. Opposite II Corps the *German Africa Corps* had built up a strong defensive front. (*Map 16*) Its backbone was the *10th Panzer Division* (less elements committed east of Maknassy under *Group Lang*) interlaced with units of the *Division Centauro*. The enemy, making the best possible use of terrain well suited for defense, concentrated his forces in strongpoints, organized during earlier weeks, and effectively supported them with artillery and mortars. German air reconnaissance had detected Allied movements in the Maknassy–Sened area. The enemy interpreted these movements to indicate an American shift to the defensive in the sector east of Maknassy. But at the same time enemy intelligence concluded that these moves of Allied armored groups constituted a threat to the *10th Panzer Division*'s north flank via passes southwest of Djebel Bou Douaou (753), Meïch, Sened, or Sakket. (*See Map X.*) This assumption was altogether incorrect. Nevertheless, it caused General von Broich to abandon the idea of striking with his main armored force toward El Guettar along the Gumtree road. Instead, he held *Group Reimann* (*2d Battalion, 86th Panzer Grenadier Regiment,* reinforced by elements of the *7th Panzer Regiment* and artillery) in positions north of the

[2] (1) Patton Diary, 25 Mar 43. (2) II Corps AAR, 10 Apr 43. (3) 18 A Gp, Opn Instruc 9, 25 Mar 43. AFHQ Micro Job 10A, Reel 6C.

[3] McQuillin's command was to consist of his Combat Command A headquarters; the 1st Armored Regiment (less 1st and 2d Battalions); the 3d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry; Combat Team 60; two battalions of the 5th Armored Field Artillery Group (the 58th and 62d); one battery, 443d Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion (SP); and the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

[4] (1) Ltr, Gen Gaffey to Gen Ward, 28 Mar 43, Entry 9, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) 1st Armed Div G–3 Periodic Rpt 56, 30 Mar 43. (3) II Corps FO 4, 26 Mar 42, and FO 5, 28 Mar 43.



MAP 16

Gumtree road at Djebel Hamadi (567) and Djebel Bou Smaïl (608) to act as his flank force. Von Broich ordered the *2d Battalion, 69th Panzer Grenadier Regiment,* defending the northernmost portion of the curving horseshoe of Djebel el Mcheltat, known as Rass ed Dekhla (536), to extend its line eastward to conform with *Group Reimann's* new defensive mission. The *49th Panzer Pionier Battalion,* meantime, continued to hold the main portion of Djebel el Mcheltat with its Hill 482. The gap between it and the northeastern tip of Djebel Berda was held by elements of the *Centauro Division.* To their left was the *10th Motorcycle Battalion* extending the Axis line to include Hill 772 on Djebel Berda. Other Italian units guarded the extreme south flank as far as Djebel el Asker.[5]

On the Allied side, in the El Guettar sector, the 9th Infantry Division, using five of its six available infantry battalions, was expected to seize Hill 369 at the eastern end of

[5] (1) *10th Panzer Division, Ic, Taetigkeitsbericht,* 28–29 Mar 43. (2) *Kampfstaffel DAK, KTB, 1.I.–12.IV.43,* 24–28 Mar 43.

Djebel el Kheroua.[6] The division had never gone into attack as a unit. The prospective test was anything but easy. With imperfect maps and inadequate reconnaissance the division was to attack at night over several miles of open plain in an effort to reach the Djebel Berda complex. Those hills were steep, deeply eroded into numerous gorges, lacking in vegetation, jagged and craggy. Trails were difficult. Movement through the valleys and gulches was controlled from the adjacent high ground. Progress in any given direction over the often precipitous slopes and twisting ridges would be very difficult to maintain. Several peaks and high crests provided excellent observation enabling those who possessed them to control fire or direct the maneuvers of toiling troop units which could not see each other. In the opinion of those who fought there, the Djebel Berda, and particularly its eastern extremity, was a natural fortress capable of being defended by minimum forces for an indefinite period.[7]

The 9th Division plan of attack for 28 March provided that General Eddy's two regiments should assemble at the northwestern base of Djebel Berda, in the area which had been abandoned three nights earlier. The 47th Infantry (Col. Edwin H. Randle) was to move to attack Hill 369 from the west and south, one battalion going along Djebel Lettouchi, another along Djebel el Kheroua, and a third remaining in reserve but following toward Djebel el Kheroua.[8] The 1st Battalion, 39th Infantry, was to be in division reserve behind the 47th Infantry. The remainder of the 39th Infantry was to be motorized and held, near the northeastern corner of the Chott el Guettar, also in division reserve. The plan modified another prepared the previous day, and was issued too late to enable all units to make the necessary adaptations and preparations.[9]

The attack of 28–29 March started out as planned, with the 47th Infantry heading for Hill 369 in column of battalions from assembly points at the foot of Djebel Berda. The 1st Battalion, 39th Infantry, followed by bounds. But the silhouette of Draa Saada el Hamra ridge (with Hill 290) was mistaken for Djebel el Kheroua (with Hill 369). The 1st and 3d Battalions, 47th Infantry, captured the ridge but did not gain and occupy Hill 290, at its tip. The plans

[6] (1) Combat Team 60, 9th Division, was attached to the 1st Armored Division. (2) Staff of the 9th Infantry Division: commanding general, Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy; assistant division commander, Brig. Gen. Donald A. Stroh; chief of staff, Col. Samuel A. Gibson; G–1, Lt. Col. C. F. Enright; G–2, Maj. Robert W. Robb; G–3, Lt. Col. Alvar B. Sundin; G–4, Maj. George E. Pickett; artillery commander, Brig. Gen. S. LeRoy Irwin.

[7] (1) When they later analyzed the problem in the light of their experience, they concluded that Hill 772, the paramount observation point, should first have been captured and held, after which simultaneous attacks should have been made from west to east along the ridges of three lower mountains [Draa Saada el Hamra (316), Djebel el Kheroua, and Djebel Lettouchi (361)] with the object of capturing Hills 290, 369, and 361 respectively. Attempts to capture Draa Saada el Hamra or Djebel el Kheroua by direct assault against their northwestern faces across the open plain and valley were almost certain to result in costly failure. (2) 9th Inf Div AAR, 26 Mar–8 Apr 43, 25 Aug 43, Annex B, Terrain Study.

[8] 47th Inf Hist, 1943, pp. 5–6.

[9] Another handicap may have been lack of maps showing Hill 290 at the northeastern extremity of the Draa Saada el Hamra and giving an adequate picture of the topography west and southwest of the divisional objective, Hill 369. But the 1st Infantry and 1st Armored Divisions had 1:100,000 maps which show all these features (1st Infantry Division Journal; 1st Armored Division History). Large-scale maps were issued to II Corps units throughout the campaign. Ralph F. Weld *et al.*, Corps of Engineers: Engineer Operations Against Germany, a volume in preparation for the series UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II.



MAJ. GEN. MANTON S. EDDY.
(Photograph taken in 1945.)

went further astray through the miscarriage of a maneuver by the 2d Battalion, 47th Infantry. Taking a route of approach during the latter part of the night somewhat to the south, this unit marched into a confusing jumble of hills and rough terrain between Djebel el Kheroua and Djebel Lettouchi, remained out of touch with the regiment for about thirty-six hours, and lost its battalion commander, intelligence officer and communication officer, its entire Company E, and the commanders of two other companies.[10] The reserve battalion (1st Battalion, 39th Infantry), committed on division order to advance toward the hills around Djebel el Kheroua, also became lost for more than a day during which, with parts of the 2d Battalion, 47th Infantry, it fought as a provisional battalion under Capt. James D. Johnston in the area of Hill 772. Thus the first day's abortive operations had been costly to the division, which now faced the second day with only two more infantry battalions on which to draw when attacking its true objective for the first time.

General Eddy arranged during 28 March to send the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry, after dark to the vicinity of Hill 290, which it was to skirt in order to approach Hill 369 from the north for a night bayonet attack while the two battalions of the 47th Infantry on Draa Saada el Hamra ridge assisted from the west. This venture was also frustrated. The truck column moving down the Gabès road drove much too close to Hill 290, from which it received heavy fire. Badly demoralized and severely hurt, most of the column pulled out and hurried back all the way to the starting point. The remainder, pinned down and unable to move in daylight, straggled back thirty-six hours later.[11]

Hill 369 remained in seeming immunity, jeopardizing any passage down the road to Gabès and prolonging the first phase of the II Corps operations under the army group instructions of 25 March. The battalions on Draa Saada el Hamra ridge and in the Djebel Berda complex would have to reorganize before being able to launch an effective assault for the capture of Hill 369, and the shifts would have to be made at night. They could not begin reorganizing until the night of 30–31 March and that meant that no strong attempt would be possible before 1–2 April, although attacks on Hill 290 were kept up in the interval.

[10] (1) In all, 232 enlisted men and 10 officers were taken prisoners. *10th Panzer Div, Ic, Taetigkeitsbericht*, 28 Mar 43. (2) 47th Inf Hist, 1943, p. 6.

[11] 39th Inf AAR, 25 Mar–8 Apr 43.

Operations thus far had demonstrated not only how attacks could go wrong but also that the enemy's positions were hewn from rock and very effectively placed for shelter or defensive fire.[12] Mortars became the favored infantry weapon, once the battle in the hills demonstrated their superior effectiveness, while relatively low amounts of rifle ammunition were used.[13]

The 1st Infantry Division meanwhile executed its part of the II Corps attack on 28 March on a front narrowed by the 9th Infantry Division's assumption of the sector from Djebel Berda to the Gabès road (inclusive). General Allen's sector extended from this road to the hills north of the Gumtree road. He placed the 16th Infantry on the southwest near Hill 336, and the 26th Infantry to the north. The 18th Infantry he initially held north of Djebel el Ank (621).[14] By 29 March, the 1st Infantry Division attack, especially in the northeast sector along Gumtree road, was progressing much more rapidly than the assault of the 9th Infantry Division farther south. As the German line was pulled back, the 18th Infantry (−) advanced toward Djebel Hamadi and Hill 574, thus protecting the flank of the 26th Combat Team, which captured Rass ed Dekhla and subsequently turned south in an envelopment movement aiming for Hill 482 on Djebel el Mcheltat. The 16th Infantry also attacked that objective. But its advance was far more difficult since it had to be executed over a four-mile stretch of open terrain and in full view of the enemy. Progress consequently was slow and costly. At the end of the day the Germans were still in firm possession of Hill 482.

Some units of the 1st Armored Division had already assembled, as noted above, to defend Gafsa in the event of a German break-through east of El Guettar, and General Patton ordered others brought down during the night of 28–29 March. The units from Maknassy had been summoned in anticipation of an armored attack from El Guettar down the Gabès road. General Patton had tried to conceal the assembly of this force, and was angry because the last contingent arrived at 0700, 29 March, instead of before dawn. The day of the 29th passed without the capture of Hill 482 on the southern portion of Djebel el Mcheltat, an event which was to have concluded the first phase of II Corps operations east of El Guettar. "We are trying to be simple, not change our plans when once made, and keep on fighting," wrote General Patton to General Marshall that day as he outlined what the II Corps had thus far been doing.[15]

The Armored Attack Toward Gabès, 30 March–1 April

Late on 29 March, 18 Army Group for the fourth time revised its directive to the U.S. II Corps. The situation was critical. The attack at Fondouk el Aouareb was failing.[16] The one at Maknassy had been abandoned. The infantry operations to open a gap for the armor southeast of El Guettar

[12] (1) 9th Div AAR, 25 Aug 43. (2) 47th Inf Hist, 1943, pp. 8–9.

[13] 47th Inf Hist, 1943, p. 20, estimates an expenditure of 4,200 60-mm., 3,500 81-mm. light, and 2,000 81-mm. heavy mortar rounds in the ten days' fighting by that unit.

[14] 1st Div AAR, 25 Aug 43, Overlay 11, to accompany G–3 Periodic Rpt, 2400, 27 Mar 43, and 1st Div FO 20, 27 Mar 43.

[15] Ltr, Patton to Marshall, 29 Mar 43. Copy in WDCSA 370 Africa, 11 Apr 43.

[16] See pp. 578–81 below.

were making no progress. At this juncture, therefore, General Alexander instructed General Patton to organize the defense of Maknassy, Sened, and Gafsa in accordance with a most detailed assignment of Patton's units, and to launch an armored force next morning to break its own way through the enemy's barrier on the El Guettar–Gabès road ahead of the infantry. After some of the difficulties involved in this set of instructions had been resolved, Patton determined to put the 1st Armored Division's task force under Colonel Benson, whose aggressiveness he admired. To make certain that that quality was kept undimmed, he sent General Gaffey to "keep an eye on the show." [17] The basic plan of operations beyond El Guettar had been radically modified by the sudden change in 18 Army Group's intentions, a change which in turn came as a result of developments elsewhere. By 30 March the British Eighth Army's battle had shifted from the Mareth Position and El Hamma area to the Chott Position. While General Montgomery reorganized for the next attempt to punch through General Messe's prepared defenses on the narrow front along the Akarit wadi, an American foray into the Axis flank, by drawing off defending troops, would obviously assist the impending attack. At the same time, during these preparations the enemy would be free at least temporarily to detach some of his mobile reserves. He could thus employ the *21st Panzer Division,* as in fact he did. He might have committed it at Maknassy. For several days, he had feared an Allied break-through there, although Kesselring recognized that such an Allied success, by leading the Americans onto a funnel-like plain and exposing them to the danger of encirclement, might ultimately benefit the Axis forces. Such fears had abated by 30 March, when it was for a time possible to consider sending a German armored column through Maknassy toward Gafsa. But the small force that could then be assembled would have been inadequate for such a thrust, and it might have been encircled and isolated. In the end the Allied initiative in concentrating for a drive southeast of El Guettar drew to that front first, on 29 March, the *Panzer Grenadier Regiment, Africa,* and, the next day, elements of the *21st Panzer Division* and an intensified commitment of the German *Luftwaffe.* To prevent an American success there, the *21st Panzer Division* on 30 March put *Kampfgruppe Pfeiffer* (consisting of one battalion of panzer grenadiers, artillery, intitank, engineer, and Flak units) at the *10th Panzer Division*'s disposal and on 31 March the whole division during the afternoon joined in the attempt to repel Task Force Benson.[18]

The II Corps operations near El Guettar from 30 March to 1 April had some initial success but did not achieve all objectives. To assist Task Force Benson's penetration, the artillery fire of both infantry divisions

[17] (1) Patton Diary, 29 Mar 43. (2) II Corps G–3 Periodic Rpt 56, 30 Mar 43. This lists the elements of Task Force Benson as: 2d Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment (mediums); 3d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment (mediums); the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion; the 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion; the 65th and 68th Field Artillery Battalions; Company B, 16th Engineer Battalion (C). The 3d Battalion, 39th Infantry, was attached from the 9th Division on 30 March. The 2d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, joined during the night of 30–31 March.

[18] (1) Mins, Conf of Kesselring, Ambrosio, and Mussolini and of Kesselring, Ambrosio, Westphal and Ruge, 1 Apr 43, in Italian Collection, Item 26. (2) MS # D–166 (Lang). (3) *21st Panzer Div, KTB, 29–31.III.43.* (4) *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB, 30.III–4.IV.43.*

and of II Corps was massed.[19] The 9th Infantry Division's attack at 0600, 30 March, was prefaced by fifteen battalion and six battery concentrations on Djebel Lettouchi and Djebel el Kheroua. This bombardment enabled the infantry to take but not to hold part of Djebel Lettouchi, while it could not even establish a footing on other hills. The 1st Infantry Division was more successful. After a morning attack, followed first by three hours of shelling by four artillery battallions, and then by a renewed infantry assault, the 26th Infantry was able to get most but not all the southern portion of Djebel el Mcheltat (Hill 482 and adjacent ridges).

Task Force Benson began its attack at noon of 30 March but did not get very far. The enemy's artillery and antitank weapons, many of them mobile, were well placed and proved much too strong. A mine field barred Benson's advance through the pass between Djebel Mcheltat and Hill 369. Before he could pull the column back out of range and extricate the leading vehicles, enemy fire knocked out five tanks and two tank destroyers. But after dark, the Americans cleared a lane through the mines north of the road and made preparations for an attack next morning at 0600 by the 3d Battalion, 39th Infantry. The object of this attack was to clear the enemy from the south side of the Gabès road and establish contact with the 9th Infantry Division. This task was accomplished. Enemy defenders finally abandoned Hill 290 after repeated American attacks and fell back one mile to their main line of resistance.[20]

Patton's first inclination on 31 March was to send his G–3, Col. Kent C. Lambert, to Colonel Benson with instructions to slam his way through at the cost, if need be, of a whole tank company, but he reconsidered, and planned instead an attack at 1600 in which supporting artillery and air would be co-ordinated with infantry and armor. The 9th Infantry Division put two companies on Hill 290, and one company each on three elevations west of that objective, and fed in more units to get Hill 772, towering above them all. General Eddy decided that his division must extend far enough westward onto Djebel Berda to include its crest.[21] Meanwhile the 1st Infantry Division in a two-pronged attack sent elements of Combat Teams 16 from the west and 26 from the north against the southeast tip of Djebel el Mcheltat, which they kept under attack all day but did not wholly occupy.[22] Without waiting for the co-ordinated attack scheduled for 1600, Benson organized a tank-infantry attack which began at about 1230. The 2d Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, passed through the lane in the mine field, fanned out, and although it lost eight tanks (four of which were salvaged), it gained possession of most of the the ground from the road to the foothills at the north and destroyed several 88's and lighter antitank guns, plus an estimated six tanks. The battalion, without any infantry support,

[19] (1) The 9th Infantry Division was supported by the 2d Battalion, 17th Field Artillery Regiment, and the 26th, 34th, and 84th Field Artillery Battalions. 9th Div AAR, 25 Aug 43. (2) The 1st Infantry Division was supported by the 5th, 7th, 32d, and 33d Field Artillery Battalions. Corps supplied the 1st Battalion, 17th Field Artillery Regiment; 1st Battalion, 36th Field Artillery Regiment; and a battalion of the 178th Field Artillery Regiment. 1st Div G–3 Rpt, 17 Apr 43.

[20] (1) II Corps AAR, 10 Apr 43. (2) 9th Div AAR, 25 Aug 43. (3) Patton Diary, 30 Mar 43. (4) 47th Inf Hist, 1943, pp. 8–10.

[21] Phone Conv, Eddy and Akers, 1045, 31 Mar 43, Entry 129, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[22] 1st Div G–3 Rpt, 17 Apr 43, p. 13.

clung to its gains until the next afternoon. The 3d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, then relieved it but had to yield some ground to increased enemy pressure. In these attacks Benson's force had lost a total of thirteen tanks and two tank destroyers. Clearly, the tactical situation in the valley was inappropriate for armored exploitation. The enemy first had to be ousted from antitank positions by infantry and artillery before the armor could lunge ahead.[23]

To reduce the enemy's resistance to Benson's attacks, Patton ordered a diversionary attack by elements of General Ward's command north of Maknassy. Patton hoped that this might also assist Ryder's operations at Fondouk el Aouareb.[24] On 31 March, General Ward ordered Combat Command A under General McQuillin to seize the mining village of Meheri Zebbeus and Djebel Djebs No. 1 (369) and thus to be in position for a breakout toward Sfax. Combat Command C under Colonel Stack remained at the railroad pass east of Maknassy. Most of McQuillin's units, particularly the infantry, had been defending their limited gains east and north of Maknassy against unremitting pressure from *Kampfgruppe Lang* ever since 27 March. They had had little relief or rest, and many casualties, and their performance reflected their poor condition. The attack began late and was smothered at its inception when its flare-illuminated right flank came under heavy machine gun fire at the base of the mountain. The defense successfully held off the infantry attack by artillery fire throughout 1 April and by next day, when Benson's attack was suspended, the whole operation had lost purpose and was abandoned.[25]

The enemy had by then brought about another change in 18 Army Group's instructions to General Patton. Enemy antitank fire had for three days thwarted the attempt by Benson's armored force to smash through his lines. Enemy air attacks by 1 April were almost incessant, amounting to at least 163 sorties in 51 distinct attacks, killing fifteen and wounding fifty-five. Late that day, General Alexander therefore ordered that the tank attacks be discontinued, and he revived instead the original scheme of 25 March that infantry operations should open the way, with the tanks in support. The second phase, that of securing positions as far forward as the pass between Djebel Chemsi and Djebel Ben Kheïr, was now to begin.[26]

Strict compliance with even these instructions was not yet possible, for the enemy still held Hill 772 and Hill 369, and dominated the pass to the north. It was already painfully apparent that II Corps' progress toward the coast had suffered severely from the cautious restraint and frequent changes in instructions imposed by 18 Army Group at the beginning of Operation WOP. Its restraining influence had permitted the enemy to occupy extremely defensible ground while the Americans were tethered to Gafsa and El Guettar. It was now obvious how unfortunate had been the withdrawal of the right flank on Djebel Berda on the night of 25 and 26 March. Yet it must be remem-

[23] (1) II Corps AAR, 10 Apr 43. (2) 1st Armd Regt AAR, 10 Jul 43. (3) Patton Diary, 31 Mar 43. (4) TF Benson Plan of Opns for 1 Apr 43 with overlay, Entry 199A, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[24] See pp. 578–81 below.

[25] (1) Rad, PHANTOM to Gen Crane (at G–3 II Corps), 1415, 2 Apr 43, reported the troops to be inactive, and the wadi to be a defensive position of dubious merit. PHANTOM reports implied minor activity in the sector on 1–2 April. (2) Patton Diary, 31 Mar 43. (3) 1st Bn 6th Armed Inf Jnl, 31 Mar–2 Apr 43.

[26] (1) Patton Diary, 1 Apr 43. (2) Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, pp. 61–62.

bered that the object of these operations remained primarily to divert enemy reserves rather than to advance onto the coastal plain against the enemy's principal force. Even if the American armored column had been in a position to gain access, either by infantry action or its own bludgeoning attack, to the enemy's rear area, General Alexander would then have had to decide whether he thought such an operation was advisable. As General Patton explained to General Marshall, Alexander specified the scope of each operation. "All I have is actual conduct of the operations prescribed." [27]

Tactical Air Support of II Corps

By 1 April, the new doctrine of air support which had been applied to the operations of II Corps seemed to have failed. The three American fighter groups operating from Thélepte and the group of light bombers from Youks-les-Bains had been visible to the ground troops from time to time, but most of their accomplishments had been out of sight and hearing. They had bombed Gafsa on 17 March, before the attack there, and on 23 March had helped throw back the *10th Panzer Division*'s counterattack, but their main mission was to win air superiority in Tunisia for the Allies by fighter sweeps against enemy aircraft in the air, and by bombing and strafing strikes against planes on the enemy's airfields. Their energies had been fully employed and they were inflicting severe damage on the enemy's air force, but in the II Corps area, in sharp contrast to the situation over the Eighth Army, the air was far from being under Allied control. The daily report from II Corps to 18 Army Group for 1 April described enemy aviation as operating almost at will over the ground troops of II Corps because of the absence of Allied air cover. Indeed, the many enemy air attacks on 1 April against Task Force Benson near El Guettar intensified the sense of frustration brought about by the enemy's reinforcement of his opposing ground units.

Since tactical air support had been furnished without stint, according to the Coningham doctrine, this commander of the Northwest African Tactical Air Force warmly resented Patton's description of conditions on his battlefield. He met the complaint by a sarcastic and supercilious rejoinder reflecting on American troops which he subsequently withdrew and for which he made appropriate official amends at General Patton's insistence.[28] The incident subjected the solidarity of Anglo-American collaboration in arms to one of its severest tests, one through which it emerged unshaken. While Air Chief Marshal Tedder, General Spaatz, and Brig. Gen. Laurence S. Kuter were visiting Patton's headquarters the day before Coningham himself came in connection with the matter, the Germans bombed the area around headquarters as if to confirm the protest that the II Corps was not benefiting from Allied air superiority.[29] But numerical superiority was increasing. Northwest African Tactical Air Force had, on 17 March, 319 aircraft and Strategic Air Force, 383; the enemy was operating far fewer from Tunisian airfields.[30] The enemy was soon trying to maintain his air strength by putting Italian crews in German fighters,

[27] Ltr, Patton to Marshall, 29 Mar 43. Copy in WDCSA 370 Africa, 11 Apr 43.

[28] Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, pp. 62–63, gives an excerpt of Coningham's circular (SPEC Nr. 40, 2 Apr 43). The retraction was dated 5 Apr 43 (SPEC Nr. 46).

[29] Patton Diary, 3–4 Apr 43.

[30] Twelfth AAF Draft Hist, Ch. X, pp. 44–46. AAF Archives.

dive bombers, and bombers and incorporating them in Luftwaffe formations.[31] The Stuka was driven out of use in Tunisia by the improved antiaircraft fire to which it was subjected and by the ability of Allied fighters to jump the dive bombers during their operations from forward fields.[32]

II Corps Is Held, 2–6 April

The American forces east of El Guettar returned, between 2 and 6 April, to the grinding effort to occupy the hills and ridges along the Gumtree and the Gabès roads. The armored force now followed up the infantry line rather than serving as a spearhead. Artillery strength increased, the ammunition expenditure was very heavy.[33] The line lengthened to almost twenty miles as it moved eastward, greatly extending the troops of the 1st Infantry Division. The 9th Infantry Division continued to be absorbed in unsuccessful struggles to master the rugged terrain west of Hill 369 on Djebel el Kheroua. Its attacks from various directions on Hill 772 on Djebel Berda were repulsed again and again. Elsewhere its success was incomplete, and the large number of casualties, particularly those of the 47th Infantry, made it less and less likely that the tired troops could ever gain the divisional objective.[34] Both infantry divisions drew engineer troops into the line as infantry before the end, and both were pushed to the limit, as was the enemy force which opposed them.[35] The 1st Infantry Division drove doggedly ahead to take the village of Sakket on 3 April, but slowed down thereafter. Its losses were not greatly different from those of the 9th Infantry Division, but were sustained by a full three-regiment unit and were therefore proportionately lighter.[36] The badly strained forward supply services over the mountains were performed by pack mules, Arabs, and Italian prisoners. The south flank of the 1st Infantry Division was not in contact with the 9th Infantry Division, and continued exposure to flank attack threatened eventually to halt the advance.[37]

German preparations for withdrawal were observed and misinterpreted as concentration for another armored counterattack like that of 23 March. Special defensive measures were therefore taken on 5 April. The men dug in, determined to hold on. The 19th Engineers (Combat), the 1st Ranger Battalion, and elements of the 1st Tank Destroyer Group set up a switch line along the Keddab wadi to stop any force that might come either along the road from Gabès or around the western end of Djebel Berda. The absence of information at II Corps headquarters on the operations of the British Eighth Army was partly responsi-

[31] Mins, Conf of Kesselring and Ambrosio, 15 Apr 43, No. 103, in Italian Collection, Item 26.

[32] Craven and Cate, *The Army Air Forces,* II, 176–77, cite what is believed to have been the last appearance of Stukas in the El Guettar area on 3 April 1943.

[33] For the four battalions supporting the 9th Division alone it totaled 31,583 rounds. With small arms and mortar ammunition it totaled 1,489 tons. 9th Div AAR, 25 Aug 43.

[34] (1) Five of the six battalion commanders were casualties; totals reported were 120 killed in action, 872 wounded in action, 316 missing in action, 186 injured, 207 exhausted, 111 diseased, and 425 returned to duty from clearing stations. *Ibid.,* p. 9. (2) These figures differ slightly from those in the II Corps report of 10 April 1943, which lists 143 killed in action, 863 wounded in action, and 360 missing in action.

[35] *10th Panzer Div, Ic, Taetigkeitsbericht,* 30 Mar–6 Apr 43.

[36] At the end of the operations, they were reported as: 126 killed, 1,016 wounded, 159 missing. II Corps AAR, 10 Apr 43.

[37] 1st Div Sitrep, 1200, 2 Apr 43.

ble for the perturbation which for a time prevailed.[38]

After an enemy counterattack failed to materialize and it became evident that he intended to withdraw, the two infantry divisions were again sent into an attack east of El Guettar on 6 April with their common objective a north-south line roughly equivalent to that of the first phase set out in the army group's plan of 25 March. Task Force Benson followed up closely in the late afternoon and pushed beyond the road junction northeast of Djebel Berda. After several days of artillery dueling, the elements of the 1st Armored Division nearer Maknassy put on another diversionary attack, Combat Command B hitting at Djebel Maïzila (522) and Combat Command C demonstrating at Hill 322. American hopes of breaking through to interfere with the *Italian First Army's* line of communications or with its defensive stand at the Chott Position were flickering out. Progress since 2 April had been much too slow to achieve such results. The higher levels of command were disappointed in operations to date, feeling that not enough had been achieved to promise success. The infantry divisions poked and jabbed at the defenders in their mountain positions without quite breaking their persistent hold. Those divisions seemed to be engaging the major part of the enemy's forces. The reinforced armored division, on the other hand, after forfeiting its best chance of successful action early on 22 March at Maknassy, seemed to have spent itself against an enemy who was inferior in strength but had exploited skillfully his advantage of position. The Armored division had also been seriously dispersed by the withdrawal of units for Task Force Benson directly under II Corps, and by the semi-independent operations of Combat Command B north of Maknassy. After going over to the defensive on 27 March it had withstood a series of enemy attacks, skillfully varied and often temporarily successful, and had sustained heavy losses.[39] General Patton prodded his sub-



MAJ. GEN. ERNEST N. HARMON
arriving to take command of 1st Armored Division.

[38] Patton Diary, 5 Apr 43.

[39] The casualties of 1st Armored Division reported at the end of the operation were (including Combat Team 60, attached): 304 killed, 1,265 wounded, 116 missing.

ordinates continually, and in the hope of bringing new energy and enthusiasm to the 1st Armored Division, he acted on a suggestion of General Alexander which confirmed his own inclination, and on 5 April replaced its commanner, General Ward, by General Harmon. Harmon, who had returned to the 2d Armored Division in Morocco after his February service as General Fredendall's deputy, took command as the tide was turning in south central Tunisia.[40] Patton's chief of staff, General Gaffey, shortly took command of the 2d Armored Division. General Ward returned to the United States, was given command of the Tank Destroyer Center, and eventually commanded the 20th Armored Division in Europe.[41]

The Enemy Pulls Out, 6–8 April

To 18 Army Group it was apparent on the night of 6–7 April that the battle for the Chott Position had reached its critical stage. General Patton was instructed to furnish maximum aid in the morning. Patton ordered American armor to be shoved eastward without regard for casualties, and the entire II Corps to drive forward for a spurt down the homestretch.[42]

Almost all of the enemy forces disengaged and slipped eastward under cover of a very heavy artillery bombardment during the night of 6–7 April, so that the attack in the morning encountered no resistance but went "smoothly." [43] Task Force Benson, reduced to one battalion of tanks, one tank destroyer company, and one company of armored infantry, started out early after Patton's admonition to the commander to plough through all resistance, and under Patton's direct scrutiny from Colonel Randle's observation post. Later, as the drive got under way, the corps commander hounded Benson by radio, then with General Keyes followed him a jeep, and when the task force stopped at a mine field, led the way through it. The jeep continued southeastward until it had reached the Kilometer 70 road marker (from Gabès). Reluctantly turning back, Patton met Benson and again told him to keep going "for a fight or a bath." Task Force Benson rolled eastward as never before. It crossed into the British Eighth Army's zone soon after the General had given his parting instruction, and between 1600 and 1700, if it did not reach the ocean shore or the enemy's positions, nevertheless arrived at a point of contact with a British Eighth Army reconnaissance detail southwest of Sebkret en Noual.[44] The meeting was a juncture of Allied forces from the eastern and western limits of the Mediterranean littoral. Closing in behind the *Italian First Army,* both were arriving at the threshold of the war's final phase in Tunisia. Task Force Benson withdrew, in

[40] (1) Msg 1043, CinC AF to CG II Corps, 2 Apr 43; Msg 60, CG II Corps to CinC AF, 2 Apr 43; Msg 240, CG II Corps to CinC AF, 1955, 3 Apr 43; Msg 1233, Eisenhower to Marshall, 3 Apr 43. Smith Papers. (2) Patton Diary, 5 Apr 43. (3) Bradley, *A Soldier's Story,* pp. 64–65.

[41] Msgs 2004 and 2802, Eisenhower to Marshall, 6 Apr 43 and 9 Apr 43. Smith Papers.

[42] (1) II Corps AAR, 10 Apr 43. (2) Patton Diary, 7 Apr 43.

[43] 1st Div G–3 Rpt, 17 Apr 43, p. 15, citing 16th Inf Rpt.

[44] The co-ordinates Y–8869 given in 1st Div G–3 Rpt, 17 Apr 43, p. 16, appear to be in error; Y–9056 are given in 18 A Gp, Sitrep 166, 2000, 7 Apr, AFHQ CofS Cable Log; Y–8868 were reported by British Eighth Army; Y–8367, by the British 2d Armored Brigade which made the contact. Army Map Service P–551/GSGS 4227, 1:200,000, Sheet 18, El Ayacha. Info received from British Cabinet Office, London.

conformity with the auxiliary mission assigned to the II Corps, to assist in driving the enemy toward Mezzouna into the main stream of Axis retreat. American artillery in the vicinity of Maknassy, and American aviation from the XII Air Support Command, harried the enemy along the Gumtree road and forced him to take secondary routes. They blocked the road with enemy vehicles, forcing the *10th Panzer Division* to use a trail near the northern edge of the Sebkret en Noual.[45]

On the hills east of Maknassy, *Group Lang* remained through daylight of 8 April, covering the withdrawal of the *10th Panzer Division, 21st Panzer Division,* and *Division Centauro* from points farther south. After dark, Colonel Lang's command joined the divisions under control of *Headquarters, German Africa Corps,* to complete the northward march along the Eastern Dorsal. The pass east of Maknassy, which both sides had so long tried in vain to possess and exploit, was occupied by Combat Team 60 and held until all Axis troops had unmistakably departed. The 1st Armored Division, whether from the Maknassy area, the El Guettar area, or elsewhere, concentrated near Sbeïtla and Sidi Bou Zid pending the outcome of operations on the coastal plain between Faïd and Fondouk el Aouareb.

Only one slim possibility remained of interfering effectively with the withdrawal of the *First Italian Army,* the *German Africa Corps,* and *Fifth Panzer Army* into northeastern Tunisia. This possibility was the use of Fondouk el Aouareb gap to place a strong Allied force on the coastal plain to hit the retreating enemy on the western flank while the Eighth Army pressed from the south. The II Corps might have been used aggressively at this point. Instead, the 9th Infantry Division pulled back at once to the Bou Chebka area, preparatory to an early shift within the week to the extreme northern flank of the British 5 Corps in the Sedjenane area. The 1st Infantry Division withdrew for five days' rest and reorganization near Morsott, north of Tébessa. The 1st Armored Division remained somewhat longer in the Sbeïtla–Sidi Bou Zid area. And the 34th Division passed from II Corps to the operational control of British 9 Corps. The 18 Army Group decided to make another attack at Fondouk el Aouareb gap using the army group reserve, reinforced by elements from II Corps and British First Army. Offensive operations by II Corps in central or southern Tunisia were at an end.

[45] *10th Panzer Div, Ic, Taetigkeitsbericht,* 7–9 Apr 43.

CHAPTER XXX

Attacks at Fondouk el Aouareb and Pursuit Onto the Plain

During the period when II Corps, with three of its divisions, was engaged in the battles for Gafsa, Maknassy, and El Guettar, the 34th Infantry Division, and later the British 9 Corps, was attempting to gain the important gap through the Eastern Dorsal near Fondouk el Aouareb. If the Allies could thus succeed in driving the enemy out of his mountain defenses they would be in a position to threaten Kairouan and possibly cut off the enemy's forces in the southern portion of the Tunisian bridgehead.

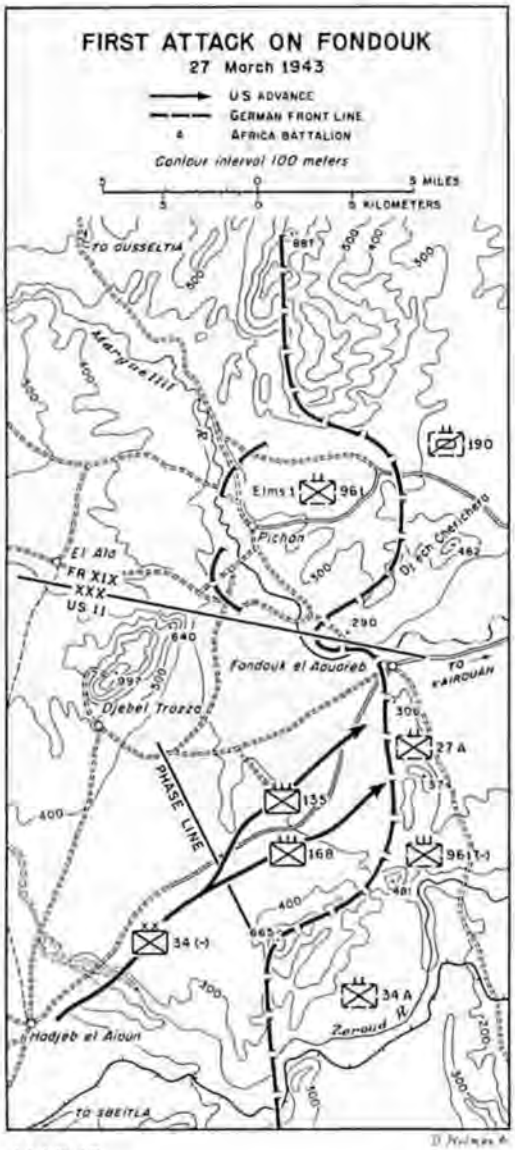
General Alexander's plan of 25 March specified that the 34th Infantry Division should attack as early as possible on the axis Sbeïtla–Hadjeb el Aïoun–Fondouk el Aouareb, to seize the heights on the Eastern Dorsal south of the gap, and Djebel Trozza (997), which is about eight miles west of it. (*Map 17*) "This ground will be firmly held," the directive stated, "to enable mobile forces to operate from there into the Kairouan plain." [1] General Patton later passed on these instructions to General Ryder, Commanding General, 34th Infantry Division, in an evening conference at Fériana on 25 March.[2] His directions to Ryder were brief and clear. The 34th Division was to make what amounted to a large-scale demonstration. Seizing Kairouan was not desired. The attack was to gain the pass and, after intermediate objectives there had been occupied, to make strong demonstrations in the direction of Kairouan.[3] The means and method were left to Ryder's discretion.

By moving a regiment on the night of 25–26 March, and a second on the following night from the area of Sbeïtla to the vicinity of Hadjeb el Aïoun, and leaving one regiment at Sbeïtla for defense, General Ryder could attack at daylight on 27 March. He left the 133d Infantry (less one battalion stationed at AFHQ in Algiers) to defend Sbeïtla, and sent the 135th and

[1] 18 A Gp Opn Instruc 9, 25 Mar 43. AFHQ Micro Job 10A, Reel 6C.

[2] The staff of the 34th Division was as follows: commanding general, General Ryder; assistant division commander, General Caffey; chief of staff, Col. Norman E. Hendrickson; G–1, Lt. Col. Thomas L. Gaines; G–2, Lt. Col. Hubert Demarais; G–3, Lt. Col. Robert B. Neely; G–4, Lt. Col. Walter W. Wendt; artillery, Brig. Gen. Albert C. Stanford.

[3] (1) Memo, CG 34th Div for CG II Corps, 25 Mar 43, sub: Opn Plan, with copy of outline plan annexed, Entry 321, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) Interv with Gen Ryder, 21 Feb 50.



MAP 17

168th Infantry into the attack. The 175th Field Artillery Battalion was to support the 168th Infantry; the 125th and 185th Field Artillery Battalions were to support the 135th Infantry; and battalions of the 178th and 36th Field Artillery Regiments were to remain in position near Sbeïtla, subject to call. Units of the 813th Tank Destroyer Battalion and the 751st Tank Battalion were to assemble near Hadjeb el Aïoun and be in reserve on the right wing of the attack. Antiaircraft batteries of the 107th Coast Artillery were attached to the field artillery. The routes of approach through a secondary pass east of Hadjeb el Aïoun or via the western side of Djebel Trozza were to be covered by reconnaissance elements.[4]

The opening at Fondouk el Aouareb, through which First Army had expected an enemy attack on 14 February that actually came through Faïd pass, is about sixteen miles northeast of Hadjeb el Aïoun at a gap where the Marguellil river goes through the eastern mountain chain. The shallow stream flows from the northwest and in an elbow turn swings eastward at the pass through a wide, marshy valley. North of the opening is the Djebel ech Cherichera (462) and its foothills. Immediately to the south, several precipitous knobs along parallel ridges of the Djebel el Aouareb (306) lead to a higher hill mass. The Zeroud river winds its way around them at a distance of 10 to 20 miles south of Fondouk. The gap at the village of Fondouk el Aouareb narrows to about 1,000 yards and the ground appears, except for occasional mounds, almost flat both east and west of it. Just west of it, on the northern side of the stream, is the Djebel Aïn el Rhorab (290), a steep-sided ridge above a large native village and spring. From this hill all of the roads from the west and

[4] Northwest of Pichon, the French XIX Corps (Divisions Mathenet and Welvert—also known as the Constantine Division) were to push across the Ousseltia valley at this time.



DJEBEL AIN EL RHORAB *as seen from Fondouk el Aouareb.*

southwest that meet in the pass en route to Fondouk el Aouareb can be observed and brought under fire. All the roads converging on the village from these directions are dominated also by the massive Djebel Trozza, with a crest over 3,000 feet high. These roads run over a bare, undulating plain cut by wadies but devoid of important vegetation except for widely scattered cactus patches and small olive groves. In the spring, the time of these operations, desert flowers of brilliant hue abound. The attack on 27 March approached the pass from the southwest along the Hadjeb el Aïoun–Fondouk el Aouareb road, which became the boundary between the two participating regiments.[5]

The defenders were in positions on the hills. The zone of which this portion was a critical part was controlled by the *Italian XXX Corps* (General Sogno) headquarters at Sousse, through *Group Fullriede* at Kairouan. The forces were neither numerous nor exceptionally well equipped, and were rather thinly strung from outposts near

[5] (1) 135th Inf Hist, Sec. IV, pp. 9–11. (2) 133d Inf Hist, 7 Jun 43, Incl 1, pp. 11–13, and Incl 2, pp. 4–5. (3) Geographical Sec Gen Staff Map 4225, Sheet 70 (1: 50,000). (4) Interv with Col Ward, 30 Nov 50.

Pichon southward to the Zeroud river. Hills northwest of Fondouk el Aouareb toward Pichon were held by two companies of the *1st Battalion, 961st Infantry Regiment,* each with three rifle platoons, one platoon with two heavy machine guns and two mortars, and one antitank platoon with two guns. This unit (of the *999th Africa Division*) consisted chiefly of court-martialed German soldiers to whom combat duty was permitted for the purpose of rehabilitation. The defense of Fondouk el Aouareb gap was its first important battle.

Along Djebel ech Cherichera and northeast of it was the *190th Reconnaissance Battalion,* reinforced with some artillery. To the south, along the crest of Djebel el Aouareb, the *27th Africa Battalion* was stationed, and from there to Djebel Hallouf (481), the *Headquarters, 961st Infantry Regiment (Kampfgruppe Wolf),* was ready. It consisted of the *1st Battalion* (−) and the *2d Battalion, 961st Infantry Regiment,* reinforced with artillery and antitank guns. As reinforcements for his sector, Colonel Fullriede could also draw on the *34th Africa Battalion,* the *2d Battalion, Italian 91st Infantry Regiment,* and some native Arab troop units. The enemy expected an attack in view of the information gleaned on 26 March from prisoners.[6]

The 34th Infantry Division's two regiments organized with the somewhat more experienced 168th Infantry (Colonel Butler) on the right nearer the enemy's principal hill positions and the 135th Infantry (Colonel Ward) on the northwest.[7] At 0600, 27 March, the attack opened on a four-battalion front. Each regiment echeloned its leading battalion and put a second battalion behind the outer company of the assault unit. The troops reached the first phase line four hours later in good order and without coming under hostile fire. The steeply sloped hills of the Eastern Dorsal crossed their path of approach obliquely, with Hill 306 on Djebel el Aouareb, the first objective, still several miles away. The next phase of the advance shortly brought the leading elements within range of shelling from both the hills to the east and those to the northwest in the vicinity of Djebel Trozza. Most fire fell at first on the 168th Infantry. American artillery drove off an enemy reconnaissance group of scout cars and two light tanks which approached from the northwest and also struck two squads of the 135th's Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon at close range. Then, as the volume of fire from the hills intensified, the 135th Infantry, ahead and on the left, stopped a little before 1400. The men sought cover from both the frontal and enfilading fire of heavy machine guns, artillery, and mortars. The 1st and 2d Battalions, 168th Infantry, heading for somewhat separated objectives on their part of the front, were only partly successful.

As nightfall drew near, the 2d and 3d Battalions, 135th Infantry, attacked abreast in fading light. They succeeded in penetrating the enemy's main line of resistance, but in the darkness which now prevailed the unit commanders lost control and could not hold their gains. A gap developed during this attack between the 135th Infantry and the 168th Infantry on its right.[8]

[6] (1) *999th Africa Division, KTB, Anlagenband 2, Einsatz TUNIS, 26.III.–12.V.43,* and maps in *Anlagenband 3.* (2) AFHQ G–2 Rpts, 8–9 Apr 43. (3) Daily Sitrep, 26 Mar 43, in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB, Anlagenband VA, Anlage 117A.*

[7] 34th Div FO 34, 26 Mar 43.

[8] (1) 135th Inf Hist, Sec. IV, pp. 9–11. (2) 168th Inf Hist, 12 Nov 42 to 15 May 43, pp. 38–39. (3) Interv with Col Ward, 30 Nov 50. (4) Memo, Col Ward for Gen Ward, 22 Jan 51. OCMH.

Another attack next morning after a heavy artillery preparation carried the advance elements to the base of the main ridge but neither then nor later did assaulting forces risk enough troops to gain full possession of the exposed upper slopes. Infiltration tactics were unsuccessful. Three days of small infantry attacks followed, and during this period the northern flank of the 135th Infantry was under persistent enfilading fire by flat trajectory weapons which swept the reverse slopes of forward ridges and severely hampered daylight movement. Several battalion officers were wounded, requiring the transfer of Lt. Col. Albert A. Svoboda, regimental executive officer, to command the 2d Battalion, and the regimental S–1, Capt. Ray Erickson, to be Svoboda's operations officer, while the executive officer of the 1st Battalion, Maj. Garnet Hall, was shifted to command the 3d Battalion. These vital changes occurred while the units were thoroughly engaged, and weakened the regimental staff. Farther south, elements of the 168th Infantry gained some isolated crests. On the morning of 31 March, a mobile armored force struck an enemy group lurking in the cactus and olive groves on the northwestern slopes of Djebel Touil (665), about five miles south of the main battle area, and drove them out despite strong fire from adjacent hills and an attack by Axis dive bombers. This operation was thought to have forestalled, at the cost of two tanks, an enemy blow at the 168th Infantry's southern flank.[9]

The 34th Infantry Division's attack was stopped short of Fondouk el Aouareb gap on 28 March and never actually reached it. Furthermore, General Ryder adhered to General Patton's oral instruction to make a lot of noise but not to run grave risks merely to gain ground.[10] Co-ordination and control were defective. The Germans in consequence derived a low estimate of American soldiers. "The American gives up the fight as soon as he is attacked. Our men feel superior to the enemy in every respect," a German inspector reported on 2 April.[11]

On the nights of 31 March–1 April and 1–2 April, with the division's combat condition reported as only "fair," the infantry units fell back well out of the range of the heavy machine guns and artillery in their protected emplacements on the Djebel Aïn el Rhorab, the Djebel el Aouareb, Djebel el Djeriri (374), and Djebel Hallouf, to defensive positions four miles to the west. There they waited and rested.[12]

The Second Attack at Fondouk el Aouareb Falters

Benefiting from his first attempt at Fondouk el Aouareb, during which he realized, after testing its defenses, that he had committed too small a force, General Alexander directed that the new effort should be part of a much broader push extending for fifteen miles from Fondouk el Aouareb northeastward along the mountain chain to the northern extremity of Djebel Ousselat

[9] (1) See n. 8 above. (2) 751st Tank Bn (M) AAR, 30 Apr 43. The force consisted of Company C, 751st Tank Battalion; Company A, 813th Tank Destroyer Battalion; one motorized company of the 109th Combat Engineers.

[10] (1) Interv with Gen Caffey, 21 Feb 50. (2) Ltr, Lt Col Donald C. Landon to author, 17 June 51.

[11] *999th Africa Division, KTB, Anlagenband 2, Einsatz TUNIS 26.III.–12.V.43, Rpt Nr. 4* (Capt Retzlaff), Sec. III.

[12] (1) 34th Inf Div G–3 Periodic Rpts 48, 31 Mar 43, and 49, 1 Apr 43. (2) 168th Inf Hist, 12 Nov 42–15 May 43, reported casualties as follows: killed, 17; wounded, 108; missing, 178.

(887). For the whole offensive, General Koeltz's French XIX Corps (under British First Army) and the British 9 Corps commanded by Lt. Gen. Sir John Crocker (directly under 18 Army Group) were to be used. British combat units for the prospective operation could not get into position before 7 April, when not much time would be left for the break-through if the enemy was to be intercepted on the coastal plain.[13] The 34th Infantry Division (from U.S. II Corps), the British 6th Armoured Division, 128th Infantry Brigade, and two squadrons of the 51st Royal Tank Regiment (temporarily released by British First Army) comprised General Crocker's command.[14]

The ultimate objective, at one time to confine the enemy's retreat to the coastal road east of Kairouan, was redefined before the attack began as interception and destruction of retreating forces.[15] American and British infantry were expected to open the pass while the British armor went through in order to carry out its mission on the coastal plain, and while French and other British units swept the enemy from the hills north of Fondouk el Aouareb gap.

On the day before the attack, General Crocker, at General Ryder's headquarters near the village of Djebel Trozza, held a command conference which was attended by his principal subordinates and by General Koeltz. The British 9 Corps plan was set forth and the plans for each of the participating major units then explained. General Crocker had established the northern boundary of the 34th Division's zone along the southern edge of the Marguellil river, thus splitting the gap itself, as well as the approach from the west, into American and British areas of attack. (*Map 18*) In conformity with preliminary understandings, General Ryder's plan prescribed the employment of all three of his regiments (including the two-battalion 133d Infantry) and more armor and artillery than in the first attack, after making a sideslip to the northward from their current positions southwest of the gap.[16] The assault would be made squarely eastward toward the heights south of Fondouk el Aouareb. Its left flank would depend for protection upon a simultaneous attack by the British 128th Brigade aimed at denying to the enemy the use of Djebel Aïn el Rhorab. The ground over which the 34th Division would attack was so open as to make the frontal assault on Djebel el Aouareb's steep and craggy slopes a formidable task. But the additional enfilading fire to be expected from Djebel Aïn el Rhorab could be positively devastating.

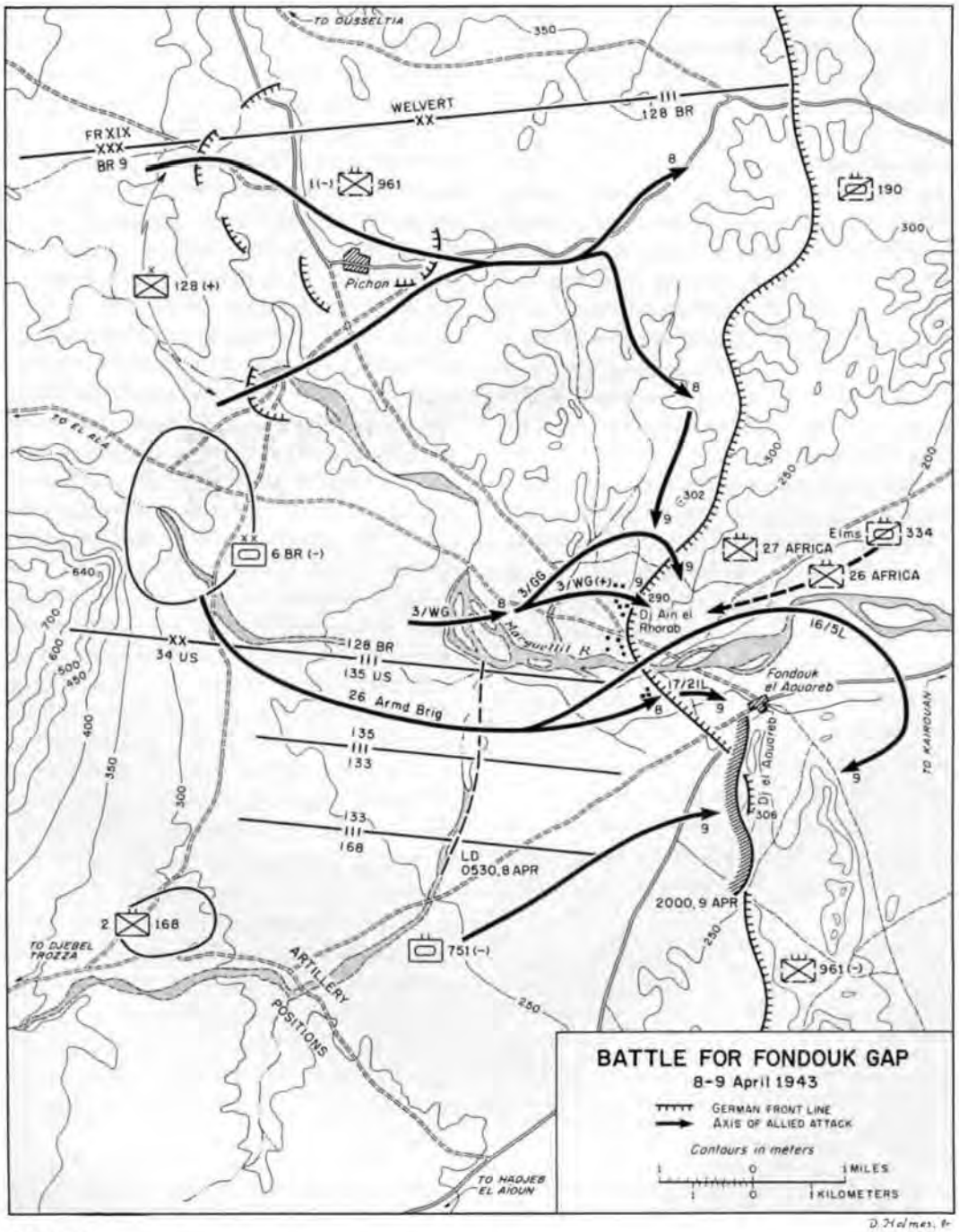
At the command conference on 6 April, General Ryder learned for the first time that the British 128th Infantry Brigade would attack initially the heights east of Pichon, and then move southward toward Djebel Aïn el Rhorab, which it could reach at best only after the passage of several hours of

[13] Rpt, Brig Sugden to G–3 AFHQ, 7 Apr 43, sub: Conv between Sugden and Gen McCreery, 6 Apr; Memo, Col James F. Torrence, Jr., for G–3 AFHQ, 3 Apr 43. AFHQ G–3 Ops, Micro Job 10A, Reel 6C.

[14] German officers who took part in this operation have stated that a maximum effort at Fondouk el Aouareb and by Eighth Army north of Sfax could have shortened the war in Tunisia by one month. MS # T–3 (Nehring *et al.*), Vol. 3a.

[15] For former objective, see Colonel Torrence's Memo of 3 April based on 2 April conference with General McCreery and Brigadier Holmes; for the latter, Brigadier Sugden's report of 7 April after talking with McCreery. Both cited in n. 13 above.

[16] (1) General Crocker visited the area for ground reconnaissance presumably on 1 April, Msg, 18 A Gp to II Corps, 1826, 31 Mar 43, Entry 159, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) Interv with Gen Ryder, 21 Feb 50.


TO DJEBEL TROZZA
ARTILLERY POSITIONS
TO HAOJEB EL AIOUN
TO KAIROUAN
Fondouk el Aqoureb
Dj el Aqoureb
Dj Ain el Rhorab
Marguellil R.
Pichon
Elms
2000, 9 APR
LD 0530, 8 APR
FR XIX Corps
XXX
BR 9
WELVERT
XX
III
128 BR
XX
34 US
III
135 US
26 Armd Brig
135
III
133
133
III
168
2
168
751 (-)
961
961 (-)
190
334
27 AFRICA
26 AFRICA
6 BR (-)
128 (+)
3/GG
3/WG
3/WG(+)
16/5L
17/21L
BATTLE FOR FONDOUK GAP
8-9 April 1943
GERMAN FRONT LINE
AXIS OF ALLIED ATTACK
Contours in meters
MILES
KILOMETERS
D. Holmes, fr

MAP 18

daylight. Later recollections of the discussion which followed are somewhat conflicting, but General Ryder's misgivings concerning the exposed northern flank of his attack, however clearly he may have expressed them, produced no change in the corps orders. General Crocker and his chief of staff, Brig. Gordon MacMillan, then believed, as they did after the operation, that Djebel Aïn el Rhorab was much less strongly held than the heights east of Pichon and was not a serious menace to Ryder's attack. General Ryder's division could not add the seizure of Djebel Aïn el Rhorab to its other responsibilities or even gain permission to reply to fire received from it, except to cover it with smoke shells during the critical opening phase.

The whole operation, as British 9 Corps planned it, would occur in three phases. First, the British 128th Infantry Brigade would seize crossings over the Marguellil river west of the village of Pichon early on the night of 7–8 April, thus enabling engineers to construct bridging for tanks and other vehicles before daylight. At dawn it would continue to the east to gain the heights beyond Pichon, then turn southward toward Fondouk el Aouareb gap to neutralize or occupy Djebel Aïn el Rhorab. The second phase would consist of parallel attacks by the 128th Infantry Brigade and the 34th Infantry Division on opposite sides of the river to drive the enemy from the heights. In the third phase, the British 6th Armoured Division was to pass through the gap.[17] The decision whether the tanks of the 26th Armoured Brigade would be sent through first or be preceded by the 1st Guards Brigade was deferred until the course of the battle had clarified the nature of the defense to be overcome. Moreover, if General Crocker should have to use the 1st Guards Brigade to clear Djebel Aïn el Rhorab, it would of course leave no alternative to a decision to use British armor at the head of the column through the gap.[18]

With the start of operations so near, and with the elements of British 9 Corps assembling within sight of Djebel Trozza on 5–6 April, General Ryder faced an extremely difficult situation. His troops had just failed in one attack against the objective which they were now to assault for the second time. It would be extremely difficult to get them in motion again once they had been pinned down by heavy enemy fire. They might succeed, of course, despite their inexperience in night attack, in crossing to the hills under cover of darkness, but once they were there, they could no longer be aided by an air bombardment.[19] Air bombing was more desirable than artillery fire because the enemy could take shelter behind great boulders on the reverse slopes of Djebel el Aouareb's several ridges and emerge unhurt when the artillery fire was lifted. Any daylight advance on the American side of the Marguellil river would be, as noted, in serious jeopardy while the enemy could fire from Djebel Aïn el Rhorab. General Koeltz, whose corps had been driven out in January after holding

[17] Br. 9 Corps Opn Order 2, 1100, 6 Apr 43, in 34th Div G–3 Jnl.

[18] (1) Intervs with Gens Ryder, Caffey, and Bull, 21 Feb 50. (2) Statement by Lt Gen Sir Gordon MacMillan, 4 Sep 50, based on his diary. OCMH. (3) Gen Koeltz, Note établié de mémoire sur la réunion tenue le 6 avril 1943 au P. C. du Général Ryder, 1950. OCMH. (4) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (5) 9 Corps Opn Order 2, 6 Apr 43, in 34th Div G–3 Jnl.

[19] The prevailing methods of tactical bombing support required that the troops remain west of a bomb line 2,000 yards from the target, rather than marking their forward line by smoke or panels, or using radio communications direct to the planes.

Fondouk el Aouareb gap for a time, and who had planned several times to retake it, knew the terrain very well. He could appreciate General Ryder's conviction, a conviction also reached by Maj. Gen. Harold R. Bull on arrival at General Ryder's command post during the afternoon before the attack, that the U.S. 34th Infantry Division was being committed under a faulty plan which threatened to result in failure. But it was now too late to revise the entire scheme of attack.[20]

General Ryder balanced the factors affecting his part of the attack and concluded that he should get his assault battalions on the objective before dawn. He obtained consent from 9 Corps to advance his attack from 0530 to 0300. Corps concluded that the preparatory air bombardment of Djebel el Aouareb should be cancelled, and notified the division just before midnight, 7–8 April, that no such bombing would take place. The leading infantry units were then marching in a northeasterly loop to the line of departure at a large wadi running generally north and south some 5,000 yards from the base of the hills. At 0220, a liaison officer left division headquarters with orders to cross the line of departure at 0300.[21]

The attack was to be made by two regiments in column of battalions, the 135th Infantry on the north and the 133d on the south. Each regiment put its 3d Battalion ahead on a 1,500-yard front. The 1st and 3d Battalions, 168th Infantry, were at first to protect the tank and artillery assembly areas, and to patrol toward Djebel Touil. The 2d Battalion was held in reserve near the division command post. One company of the 751st Tank Battalion was to assemble south of the line of departure for commitment with the assault infantry on division order, while the remainder of the tanks, with the 813th Tank Destroyer Battalion (less one company), were held farther to the south for commitment on that flank or elsewhere as required. To the south and rear of the line of departure, six battalions of artillery were set up for massed fires. Farther to the rear, the 36th Field Artillery Regiment (less 1st Battalion) was emplaced. The deep northern flank was protected by a company of the 813th Tank Destroyer Battalion and the 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry. Eventually this infantry battalion would be released by the division to the 133d Infantry on the southern wing of the assault. The 135th Infantry was directed to smoke appropriate targets on its left flank by mortars, but Djebel Aïn el Rhorab would be out of mortar range.[22]

Upon arriving at a co-ordinating line about 1,500 yards from the base of Djebel el Aouareb the two leading battalions on the assault line were expected to pause for reorganization while the Commanding Officer, 3d Battalion, 135th Infantry (Major Hall), fired a flare as a signal for the beginning of artillery preparation fire. Because of communications difficulties the two battalions did not attack until about 0530, instead of at 0300 as ordered. Hall's battalion veered to the north on the way to the co-ordinating line, causing a gap to develop between it and the 3d Battalion, 133d Infantry. At

[20] (1) Intervs with Gens Ryder and Bull, 21 Sep 50. (2) Gen Koeltz, Note établié de mémoire sur la réunion tenue le 6 avril 1943 au P. C. du Général Ryder, 1950. OCMH.

[21] (1) 34th Div FO 30, 0830, 7 Apr 43, and amendments, 1130, 7 Apr 43. (2) G–S Msg File and Jnl, 34th Inf Div, 1–8 Apr 43; 133d Regt Jnl, Apr–May 43. (3) Statement by Gen MacMillan, 4 Sep 50. OCMH.

[22] 34th Div FO 30, 0830, 7 Apr 43, with amendments, 2350, 7 Apr 43.

0630, the artillery men saw the signal and began shelling the objective. At the same time the enemy opened up on the attacking infantry with mortar and machine gun fire. To fill the gap, 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry (Lt. Col. Robert P. Miller), hurried forward across the flats toward the assault line as the rising sun shone from behind the enemy, and as hostile fire from the left and the front quickened.

At this juncture, General Ryder learned that the artillery had been signaled when the troops were still considerably short of the line specified in the plans and when in fact most of them were still west of the 2,000-yard bomb line. He therefore tried at about 0745 to have the infantry stopped, the artillery alerted to mark the target by smoke shells, and an air bombing mission reinstated for the half hour from 0800 to 0830. Some of the infantry had to pull back. The enemy in front quieted down on the south and center but remained very active on the north, and on the northern flank, as the minutes ticked off but the air attack failed to materialize. The strike was postponed one hour and, at 0930, was abandoned altogether. The artillery then repeated its preparation with smoke and high explosive, and the infantry resumed its advance.[23]

The attack started forward by bounds under increasing enemy fire which in spots raised a cloud of dust almost as opaque as a smoke screen. Every attempt to reply brought a quick response from well-registered enemy artillery. The men then reacted as General Ryder had anticipated they would. They dug shallow trenches, found dry wadies, or lay behind sand hummocks for cover. Troops comprising the northern wing of the attack could not be induced to go forward into a curtain of fire such as they had never previously encountered.[24] Elsewhere the attack also dragged to a stop.

The British 128th Infantry Brigade, supported by Churchill tanks of the 51st Royal Tank Regiment, attacked at the designated time through Pichon to the heights east of the village but fell somewhat behind schedule. Turning south at 1500, the brigade stopped about a mile and a half from Djebel Aïn el Rhorab in the latter part of the afternoon, after the enemy on Djebel Aïn el Rhorab switched his heavy mortar fire northeastward to oppose its progress. About 1600, when the 34th Infantry Division, supported by American tanks, renewed its attack toward Djebel el Aouareb the British 26th Armoured Brigade passed through the division's area, much to the Americans' surprise and confusion. American infantry reached some of the enemy's positions at the base of the hills but could not hold them. The 135th Infantry units, after withdrawal, were partly interspersed among vehicles of the British armored force, which remained deployed in attack formation. Reorganization under enemy observation and under the increased fire attracted by these vehicles was necessary before the regi-

[23](1) 34th Div FO 30 with amendments. (2) Msgs, 8 Apr 43, in 34th Div G–3 Jnl. (3) Interv with Col Ward, 30 Nov 50. (4) Memo, Col Ward for Gen Ward, 22 Jan 51. OCMH. (5) Intervs with Gens Ryder and Caffey, 21 Feb 50.

[24](1) 135th Inf Hist, p. 10. (2) Maj Roland Anderson, Operations of the 135th Infantry in the Vicinity of Fondouk el Okbi [Aouareb], 26 March–11 April 1943, MS, pp. 18–19. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga., 1947–48. This relates Anderson's personal experience. (3) Capt Virgil E. Craven, Operations of Company I, 133d Infantry, at Fondouk [el Aouareb] Gap, 8 April–9 April 1943, MS, p. 15. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga., 1949–50. This relates Craven's personal experience.

ment could again engage, as it did early next morning, in co-ordinated action. At all points, the first day's attack at Fondouk el Aouareb gap had been thwarted.[25]

When General Keightley, 6th Armoured Division commander, returned to his command post about 1830 from a reconnaissance toward the pass, he found orders from General Crocker to create or discover a path through the enemy's mine field during the night, to push the tanks through early next morning, and to protect his own left flank from enemy guns and mortars on Djebel Aïn el Rhorab by sending one battalion of infantry to take it before daylight.[26] Crocker insisted that Djebel Aïn el Rhorab was lightly held or possibly even abandoned and must not be "re-occupied." Actually, it was strongly defended by a small force which was to be reinforced. Keightley sent the 3d Battalion, Welsh Guards (3/WG), to patrol as far as Djebel Aïn el Rhorab that night and to attack as early as possible in the morning. When General Crocker discovered at daybreak, 9 April, that Djebel Aïn el Rhorab was just about to be attacked but that a path through the mines had not been opened, and the enemy's defenses had not yet been fully tested, he sent the 26th Armoured Brigade into the pass, ordered the entire Guards Brigade, if necessary, to occupy Djebel Aïn el Rhorab, and directed the 128th Infantry Brigade to assist them.

At 0900, 9 April, before General Crocker's orders had been executed, thirty-one of General Ryder's tanks were on the 34th Division objective ahead of his infantry in an attack without benefit of artillery preparation, but the infantry remained pinned down under intensified ground fire and an enemy dive-bombing, so that the whole effort went for naught. Five tanks were lost. A second attempt about 1130 on a narrower portion of the front reached the lower slopes of Hill 306 but was then smothered by fire, mainly from the north flank.[27] The remaining tanks were then sent to the rear, out of range. The British 6th Armoured Division would apparently have to punch its own way through the gap.[28]

Djebel Aïn el Rhorab was captured during the afternoon, 9 April, by the 3d Battalion, Welsh Guards, supported by tanks of the 2d Lothians, and was mopped up with the help of the 3d Battalion, Grenadier Guards (3/GG). They took over 100 German prisoners from the *26th* and *27th Africa Battalions*. The 135th Infantry was still receiving fire from the left as late as 1430, but they were ordered not to reply.[29]

On 8 April the enemy was forced to commit his reserves to prevent the Allies from breaking through to the Kairouan plain. Shortly before Djebel Aïn el Rhorab was captured by the British, Colonel Fullriede reinforced the two companies of the *27th Africa Battalion* defending Djebel Aïn el Rhorab and the hills to the north of it by sending into the line the *26th Africa Battalion*. On 9 April, as the situation further deteriorated, he committed one company of the *334th Reconnaissance Battalion* with

[25] Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[26] Issued as 9 Corps Operation Order 3, at 2050, 8 April 1943, supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[27] The Medal of Honor was awarded posthumously to Pvt. Robert D. Booker, a machine gunner of the 133d Infantry for bravery and leadership on 9 April 1943.

[28] (1) See n. 24 above. (2) Msgs in 168th Inf Misc File, Apr 43. (3) Ltr, Col Landon to author, 17 Jan 51.

[29] (1) Statement by Gen MacMillan, 4 Sep 50. OCMH. (2) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (3) Interv with Col Ward, 30 Nov 50. (4) 34th Div G–3 Jnl, 1430, 9 Apr 43. (5) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB V*, 9 Apr 43.

the mission of regaining the lost ground on the djebel. The antitank company (armed with seven self-propelled antitank guns and a captured and converted American armored car) took up positions to the south of the Marguellil river and the Kairouan road. Further to strengthen the antitank defenses of the pass area north of the river, the German commander borrowed six self-propelled 47-mm. antitank guns from the Italian *135th Armored Battalion* and two 88-mm. dual-purpose Flak guns. In the thickly mined pass were at least thirteen heavy antitank guns on the southern side of the river and two more north of it. Through this gantlet the British armor was waiting to run.[30]

Failure to obtain the pass on 8 April for the unimpeded passage of the British 6th Armoured Division threatened to frustrate the purpose of the whole effort, which, as already pointed out, has been running on a very close schedule from the first. The Chott Position at the Akarit wadi had been defended only briefly. The *Italian First Army* was already streaming northward over the coastal plain, on the roads leading east of Kairouan. Although the *German Africa Corps* was nearer the mountain chain, it could still be intercepted only if the Allied armored units were on the plain south of Kairouan before 10 April.

British 6th Armoured Division Breaks Out at Fondouk el Aouareb

While the 3d Welsh Guards and the U.S. 34th Infantry Division were attacking, the British 26th Armoured Brigade spent the morning of 9 April and the first half of the afternoon in a successful effort to penetrate the enemy's deep but irregular belt of mines across the gap. The 17/21 Lancers with some Royal Engineers found a lane which permitted one small tank unit to get through about 1215 before being stopped by fire from Fondouk el Aouareb village, 400 yards beyond the mine field. As British along with a number of American troops boldly tried to clear another lane farther south, the 16/5 Lancers discovered a twisting and difficult path which involved crossing the stream bed to the northern side, working along that bank for almost a mile, and then turning south to recross the Marguellil on the far side of Fondouk el Aouareb village. Allied counterbattery fire during this protracted and courageous action took its toll of the enemy's antitank guns, but they in turn knocked out enough British tanks to bring the total to a considerable figure. The Coldstream Guards were ordered to clear the enemy from those heights nearest the gap, originally in the U.S. 34th Infantry Division's zone. The American zone was then narrowed in order to transfer this area to the British 6th Armoured Division. Armored units began to emerge on the eastern side of the mine field between 1500 and 1800, 9 April. The enemy in the hills facing General Ryder's troops prepared to join the main northward retreat during the night.

The 1st Battalion, 133d Infantry, attacked to gain the summit of Hill 306 and adjacent ground after dark, 9–10 April. The Americans reached the crest while a few of the defenders were still there, and drove them off. By noon, 10 April, elements of the 34th Infantry Division including the 168th Infantry, which had relieved the

[30] *Gefechtsbericht, 3d Co* to *334th Reconnaissance Battalion* for 9 and 10 Apr 43, dtd 11 Apr 43, and *Gefechtsbericht, 334th Reconnaissance Battalion* to *Kampfgruppe Fullriede,* 11 Apr 43, in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB mit Anlagen vom 11.IV.–21.IV.43.*

133d Infantry, held the dominating hills on either side of the Marguellil river. The British armored units were by that time seeking out elements of the enemy near Kairouan, which they entered next day after the enemy's units had withdrawn.

The Enemy Slips Past Kairouan

The *Italian First Army*'s Italian elements, making good use of the holding action at Fondouk el Aouareb, had passed across the Kairouan plain on 8–9 April before the British 6th Armoured Division could block their path. But the enemy needed still more time. The German units under General Bayerlein were somewhat more slowly moving up the coast, east of Kairouan, under light pressure by British Eighth Army.[31] The remnants of the *10th Panzer* and *21st Panzer Divisions,* of *Kampfgruppe Lang,* of *Division Centauro,* and the other units under the command of the *German Africa Corps* were on the line Faïd–Sfax during the night of 8–9 April, and were to pass through Kairouan on the night of 9–10 April. The German forces defending at Fondouk el Aouareb had therefore been requested to hold until 10 April to permit their passage.[32] Before the British 6th Armoured Division could reach the plain east of Kairouan, it not only had to cross the mine field, but it also had to overcome antitank guns farther east. At the cost of four Shermans, the 16/5 Lancers drove off a determined covering enemy force at these guns late in the day.[33]

After winning their way through the gap, British 9 Corps took account of the losses (thirty-four tanks), the approaching darkness, and the possibility of a counterattack in the morning by the *German Africa Corps.* General Crocker decided not to push out onto the plain until morning and the armored elements already through Fondouk el Aouareb gap were called back into the pass to harbor for the night.[34] The 9 Corps commander and his staff concluded that the main opportunity to strike the weaker elements of the enemy had passed. They understood, moreover, that the enemy was planning to hold in the area one more day. The disappointment and sense of frustration engendered by the delay were profound.

The second attack at Fondouk el Aouareb gap subjected Allied relations to a considerable strain, for General Crocker not only recommended withdrawal of the 34th Infantry Division for retraining of junior officers at the rear under British guidance but blamed the failure of his operation toward Kairouan on the inability to get through the pass expeditiously, and that failure, in turn, upon the incapacity of the 34th Division. Similar disparagements were published shortly thereafter in the United States, where the public had quite wrongly been encouraged to expect an American drive to the sea between the two Axis armies. The German retreat was described as though "Rommel" had again succeeded in outwitting the Allies, this time because of American deficiencies. American officers aware of the issues involved later condemned the corps plan of attack on which General Crocker had insisted as being unnecessarily prodigal with American troops and maté-

[31] See pp. 540–41 above.

[32] *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB V,* 1625, 9 Apr 43.

[33] (1) See n. 30 above. (2) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB V,* 10 Apr 43. (3) *Army Group Africa, KTB,* 10–11 Apr 43.

[34] 9 Corps Opn Order 4, 2252, 9 Apr 43, supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

riel. They absolved the 34th Division of sole responsibility for failure, emphasing heavily General Ryder's predicament in being obliged to attack with an exposed flank, and minimizing the faulty aspects of his division's operations. Generals Eisenhower and Alexander took swift steps to suppress the mounting tide of recrimination, while the 34th Division acted energetically to forestall future failures. The division, after beginning at once a program of intensive training in the various types of attack—by night, with tanks, behind a rolling artillery barrage, and in mountainous terrain—and after some changes in command, was whipped into effective condition.[35]

During the night of 8–9 April all but the rear guard of the *German Africa Corps* rolled past the Fondouk el Aouareb–Kairouan area undeterred. At about 1000 on 10 April the British 6th Armoured Division completed the transit of Fondouk el Aouareb gap in time to start for Kairouan, eighteen miles away. With about 110 Sherman tanks, it moved astride the Fondouk el Aouareb–Kairouan road on a broad front. It fought several small armored engagements during a day and netted about 650 prisoners, 14 tanks, and 15 guns. At 1110, 10 April, 18 Army Group issued a new instruction to British 9 Corps. After cleaning up the area near Kairouan, it was to turn toward Sbikha in an attempt to cut off enemy forces stranded in the northern portion of the Eastern Dorsal. These instructions were put into effect on 11 April. During 10 April, Combat Command A, U.S. 1st Armored Division, pushed through Aïn Rebaou pass south of Faïd under General Patton's personal supervision and moved along the eastern side of the mountain chain. By late evening its 81st Reconnaissance Battalion had come in contact with elements of the 168th Infantry east of Fondouk el Aouareb village.[36]

By nightfall, 10 April, General Koeltz's command had succeeded in pushing through the Djebel Ousselat to the coastal plain. The Aïn Djeloula pass between Ousseltia and Kairouan, scene of the January battles, had come into French possession. (*See Map 8.*) Over 1,000 prisoners had been taken. Yet for the French, 10 April had been an extremely costly day. Their gallant General Welvert had been fatally wounded by a mine, a heavy price even for the important gains achieved.[37]

The mission of the II Corps from 17 March to 10 April had been to menace the enemy's line of communications, threaten an incursion into the rear of the *First Italian Army,* and absorb enemy strength, thereby weakening the resistance of the Axis forces to the British Eighth Army. General Montgomery's army was at the same time faced with the task of overcoming the enemy's advantage of prepared positions, first at Mareth and later at the Chott Position, an advantage which could be extremely costly

[35] (1) Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe,* p. 151. (2) Intervs with Gens Ryder and Caffey, 21 Feb 50. (3) The British 6th Armoured Division lost 19 killed, 48 wounded, and 34 tanks in Fondouk el Aouareb gap, and suffered 109 casualties at Djebel Aïn el Rhorab. In the 34th Infantry Division, the 135th Infantry reported, 8–10 April, 73 killed and 184 wounded, and the 1st Battalion, 133d Infantry, 15 killed and 82 wounded (out of 685 personnel). The 2d Battalion, 133d Infantry, was in Algiers; the 3d Battalion, 133d Infantry, was committed late and its casualties were not dated. The 168th Infantry had few losses.

[36] (1) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (2) Patton Diary, 10 Apr 43. (3) 168th Inf Hist, 11 Nov 42–15 May 43, p. 43.

[37] Giraud Hq, Rapport des opérations, p. 52. (2) Rpt, Capt Ducos to Col Carichon, 11 Apr 43, in App. to DMC Jnl.

to any attacking force and which could be nullified only if the enemy was deprived of reserves. The Americans in Tunisia and elsewhere would have been gratified if the II Corps had broken through the eastern mountain chain to deliver disastrous blows on the main body of the enemy. It was hard for them to accept the view that the II Corps was not yet equal to such a mission against the more experienced foe. But the 18 Army Group would not have authorized any large-scale American thrust beyond the mountains, once a pass through them had been secured, unless such a maneuver were likely to save a bad situation or to supply the margin of strength necessary to exploit a triumph. The issue never came to a decision, since the enemy held at all points on the II Corps front and at Fondouk el Aouareb until he was ready to withdraw.

On 13 April, the middle period of the Allied campaign in Tunisia ended. Constriction of the enemy into northeastern Tunisia had eliminated his freedom to maneuver and had cost him important airfields. The 18 Army Group made arrangements to convert and supplement these airfields, and to tighten the ring which hemmed in *Army Group Africa*. General Alexander assigned II Corps a substantial role in the final phase of the campaign, and by 11 April it was already taking steps to shift to its new zone of attack.[38]

[38] (1) The commander of *Army Group Africa* later expressed the belief that the war would have been much shortened in Tunisia if the Eighth Army had held along the Mareth Line with two divisions and sent the remainder on a wide westerly sweep to the Gafsa–Faïd area, thus releasing U.S. II Corps for a powerful attack on weakly held Kairouan in mid-March. The southern Axis army and *Group Imperiali* would then have been cut off and would inevitably have perished. See MS # C–098 (von Arnim). (2) Allied losses were reported as 603 killed, 3,509 wounded, 1,152 missing, and 1 captured. Enemy prisoners totaled 4,679. Estimated additional enemy losses were 1,600 killed and 8,000 wounded, figures undoubtedly much exaggerated. Entry 229, 14 Apr 43, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (3) Total Axis prisoners from all fronts, 20 March–14 April, were reported to be more than 6,000 German and 22,000 Italian. Msg I/286, 18 A Gp to AFHQ, 15 Apr 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 85.

PART SEVEN

ALLIED DRIVE TO VICTORY

CHAPTER XXXI

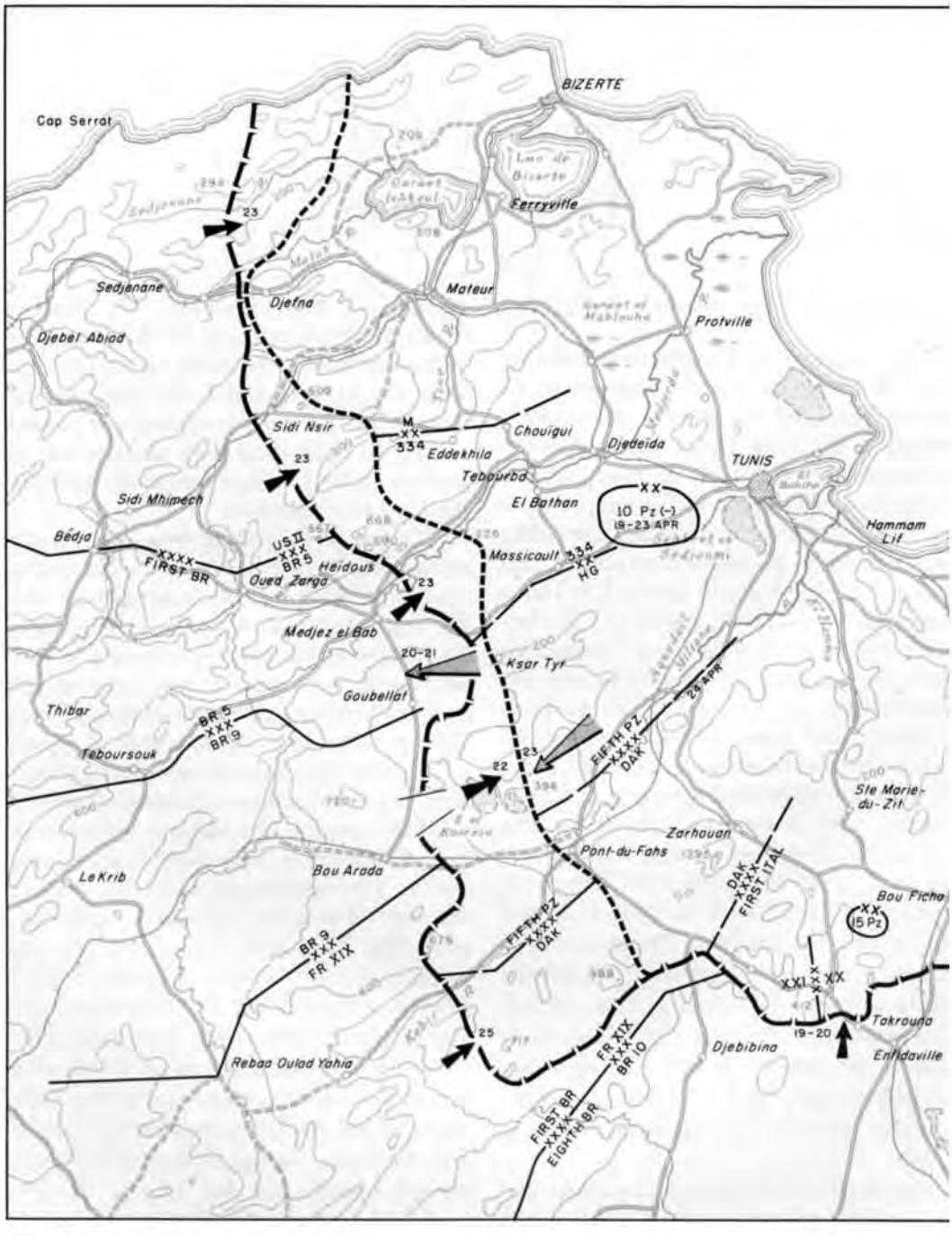
Preparations

The Terrain of the Enemy's Bridgehead

The campaign in Tunisia moved during April to the opening of its final phase. At the beginning of the month, the enemy's defense in southern Tunisia had collapsed. During the second week, he had gathered his forces in a compact sector in northeastern Tunisia behind a great arc extending from a point on the north coast east of Cap Serrat to Enfidaville and the Gulf of Hammamet on the southeast. (*Map 19*) His forward positions extended over mountains and valleys, plains, and marshlands, at a distance of thirty or more miles from the ports of Bizerte and Tunis, the main Allied objectives. While the enemy was strengthening his line, the Allies also regrouped and reorganized, with a view to pushing the line back on the flanks and piercing it in the center, south of the Medjerda river. They were ready, by the third week of April, to launch the culminating offensive. The incentive to complete the campaign in northwestern Africa at the earliest possible moment was very great. The seizure of Sicily, which was next on the Allied schedule, had to be accomplished early in the summer if it were to leave time for an important sequel in 1943.

The enemy's bridgehead contained five major regions to which the Allies had to adjust their plans and operations: (1) that north of the Medjerda river; (2) that between the Medjerda and the Miliane river with its tributary, the Kebir river; (3) that from the Miliane and Kebir rivers to the foothills on the western edge of the coastal plain; (4) the coastal plain and the flats at the base of the Cap Bon peninsula; and (5) the Cap Bon peninsula.

The first of the subdivisions is an almost rectangular area trending northeast-southwest, with Bizerte in the northeastern corner and Medjez el Bab at the southwest. Its western half is covered by hills and low, unforested mountains except close to the seacoast between Cap Serrat on the west and Bizerte on the east. The hills defy all efforts to organize them into recognizable patterns but, in general, consist of a series of widely varying complexes in which a higher crest and neighboring hills form interlocking groups. Foremost among these complexes is the one including Djebel Tahent (Hill 609) near Sidi Nsir, from whose summit it is possible to see Mateur. Fingers of high ground project from the mountain area northeastward across the coastal plain, thus enclosing a section adjacent to Bizerte and separating it from a second and narrow area north of the Medjerda between Tebourba and the ocean. Two great shallow lakes, the Garaet Ichkeul and the Lac de Bizerte, southwest and south of Bizerte, confine all overland approach to the city to narrow


BIZERTE
Cap Serrat
Ferryville
Sedjenane
Djefna
Mateur
Djebel Abiod
Protville
Sidi Nsir
M
XX
334
Eddekhila
Chouigui
Djedeida
TUNIS
Tebourba
El Bathan
Sidi Mhimech
XX
10 Pz (-)
19-23 APR
Hammam Lif
Bédja
XXXX
FIRST BR
US II
XXX
BR 5
Heidous
Oued Zarga
Massicault
334
XX
HG
Medjez el Bab
20-21
Ksar Tyr
Goubellat
23 APR
Thibar
BR 5
XXX
BR 9
Teboursouk
FIFTH PZ
XXXX
DAK
Ste Marie-du-Zit
Zarhouan
Pont-du-Fahs
Le Krib
Bou Arada
DAK
XXXX
FIRST ITAL
Bou Ficha
XX
15 Pz
BR 9
XXX
FR XIX
FIFTH PZ
XXXX
DAK
XXI
XX
19-20
Tokrouna
Djebibina
Enfidaville
Rebaa Oulad Yahia
FR XIX
XXX
BR 10
FIRST BR
XXXX
EIGHTH BR

MAP 19



belts between the shores and the hills. The Tine river runs northeast and north from sources south of Hill 609 to the plain near Mateur.

Access from this northern portion of the enemy's bridgehead to that south of the Medjerda river is easiest via bridges at Medjez el Bab, El Bathan (near Tebourba), Djedeïda, and Protville nearest the river's mouth. This second subdivision is narrower, and more nearly trapezoidal, with a western side running almost due south from Medjez el Bab to Djebel Mansour (678) and the Kebir river, and with the Medjerda on the northwest and the Miliane at the southeast converging somewhat as they approach the ocean. In this area the enemy had pushed an even shorter distance into the hills from the inland margin of the coastal plain. Of the two fingerlike extensions of lower hills projecting northeastward here, the one nearer the Medjerda had been the scene of the battles of Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division, in defense of Medjez el Bab in early December. The other is a wedge narrowing from the Sebkret el Kourzia at its southwestern base to a point southeast of Massicault. Between these two fingers is the Goubellat plain, from which a force approaching Tunis could emerge onto the coastal plain by passing through an opening northwest of Ksar Tyr. The principal road from the west to Tunis crosses the Medjerda river at Medjez el Bab to enter this second subdivision of the bridgehead, continues generally east through a gap in the northern series of hills, and swings northeastward through Massicault to Tunis. Another road passes through Pont-du-Fahs, on the southern edge of the area, and along the Miliane river to Tunis. From the Bou Arada valley west of Pont-du-Fahs, an easy approach to Tunis requires a route either

through Pont-du-Fahs or over the Goubellat plain, routes that in each case arrive at the broad coastal plain from a slightly higher area after passing through relatively narrow outlets. Tunis itself is in this region, and is ringed closely on the north and west, and at a greater distance on the south and southeast, by a series of low hills. The city lies between the western edge of El Bahira lake and the northeastern rim of the still shallower Sebkret es Sedjoumi.

The relatively long and narrow third subdivision of the enemy's bridgehead, that between the Miliane river and the coastal plain on the Gulf of Hammamet, includes a segment of the higher mountains which stretch across Tunisia northeasterly as far as Cap Bon. Here the enemy's forward line in April continued southeast from Djebel Mansour, crossed the Kebir river, and turned northeastward, after circling Djebel Chirich (717), into the hills which formed the enemy's Enfidaville position. The mountains in this subdivision are divided into two major sections by an east-west valley at the northern edge of Djebel Zarhouan (1295), along which runs a road connecting the Miliane valley road net with the coastal highway at Bou Ficha. The mountainous section north of this transverse valley is further divided into an eastern and a western segment by a valley and north-south road between Tunis and Ste. Marie-du-Zit. Here was an area which offered opportunity for a long-drawn out defense and which contained valuable routes that could be used to shift strength quickly to effective points for counterattack.

The coastal plain at the southeastern limit of the enemy's forward line narrows to a ribbon of flatland adjacent to the Gulf of Hammamet as the foothills on the west jut eastward near Djebibina and Takrouna toward the shore. Enfidaville is a road center at the southern end of this ribbon. Although the coastal plain throws out an arm toward Zarhouan west of Bou Ficha, it remains narrowly confined as it extends northeastward. Near Hammamet it merges with the triangular-shaped flats at the base of the Cap Bon peninsula, and on the other side of these flats, narrows to the very limited shelf near Hammam Lif, where the distance between steep heights and the surf of the Golfe de Tunis is only a few hundred yards. The coastal plain is thus readily defensible against an armored force by troops possessing the heights and equipped with appropriate weapons.

Cap Bon is at the northeastern tip of a peninsula approximately fifty miles long and from fifteen to twenty-five miles wide. A ridge extending from Hammamet to Cap Bon falls away in a great series of shoulders and gullies to coastal lowlands and, except near the base, confines the roads to a loop around the outer edge. The peninsula has no sheltered ports of any consequence, but its long coast line has many stretches of beach and several small ports which could be used for the reinforcement, supply, or the evacuation of troops by small craft. The Allies were alert in April to the possibility that the Cap Bon peninsula might be used as the site of a last-ditch, Bataan-like defense which could drag out the operations in Tunisia and disrupt preparations to seize Sicily.

The Allied Plan of Attack

Allied plans for the attack were under consideration at the highest levels of command even before operations in southern and south central Tunisia were at full scale. General Alexander's thorniest problems were to determine the axis of main attack

and the mission for U.S. II Corps. He had retained General Anderson in command of British First Army, to whose operations he himself gave close personal attention, and he decided to follow General Eisenhower's suggestion that the chief effort be made toward the east through First Army's sector. Allied concentration and preparation there could be completed sooner, and subsequent maintenance would be easier. First Army, which may have felt that its hard fighting had not been properly recognized by the general public, would thus have its chance to gain renown. But what would be done with II Corps? "I desire that you make a real effort to use the II U.S. Corps right up to the bitter end of the campaign, even if maintenance reasons compel it to be stripped down eventually to a total of two divisions and supporting Corps troops," wrote the Commander in Chief, Allied Force, at the same time that he suggested a major role for First Army.[1] It should be given a mission, he prescribed, which would keep it committed aggressively. If any Allied sector was to be narrowed or pinched out by the northward progress of Eighth Army and the eastward drive by First Army, the best interests of the Allied military effort required that the sector not be that of the U.S. II Corps. That force must be used fully until the enemy capitulated, both in order to furnish experience which would be devoted subsequently to training the only great body of Allied reserves—that being organized in the U.S.—and to serve the needs of American morale.[2]

In conformity with these suggestions, General Alexander's staff drafted plans by 8 April which included provision for a II Corps zone at the northern flank of the Allied front. The Combined Chiefs of Staff approved the project on 9 April, and on the next day the plans were back in General Alexander's hands with instructions to execute them. He then issued preliminary instructions to the commanders of British First Army and Eighth Army. He directed Anderson to prepare to make the main attack about 22 April. He instructed Montgomery, who had requested on 11 April the immediate transfer of the British 6th Armoured Division to his operational command, that the Eighth Army was to conduct a subsidiary operation rather than to attempt a sudden piercing of the Enfidaville position, and that Montgomery was to release an armored division and an armored car brigade to strengthen First Army's attack. On 12 April, discussing with General Alexander the role of II Corps, General Patton objected to a proposal that II Corps, which had operated since 8 March directly under 18 Army Group, should be subordinated once more to British First Army. On 14 April, General Eisenhower flew to Haïdra to confer with Generals Alexander, Anderson, Patton, and Bradley on the plans, and in particular on the arrangements respecting II Corps. British 9 Corps' attribution of the blame for failure at Fondouk el Aouareb to inferior performance by the U.S. 34th Infantry Division, the low regard in which General Alexander and some of his staff held the U.S. 1st Armored Division, and the reluctance of Alexander's logistical advisers to see the Allied line of supply in the north burdened by the requirements of a full four-division American corps, were all

[1] Ltr, CinC, AF to CG 18 A Gp, 23 Mar 43. Copy in OPD Exec 8, Bk. 8, Tab 53.

[2] Queries, CinC AF to CG 18 A Gp, in FRCOS to 18 A Gp, No. 1044, 2 Apr 43; Ltr, CinC AF to CofS, 29 Mar 43. Copies in OPD Exec 8, Bk. 8, Tab 53.

factors which had led Alexander to reconsider the subject of fully using American troops under American command during the next phase of the Tunisian campaign. At the insistence of the Americans, he assented to these arrangements. On 16 April, 18 Army Group issued the final plan. The Allied operations were intended to tighten the cordon around the enemy, to drive a wedge dividing the portion of his bridgehead adjacent to Tunis from that near Bizerte, to seal off the Cap Bon peninsula, and to overwhelm first the defenders of Tunis and next the defenders of Bizerte. A program to strangle the Axis line of supply was ready as well as another operation to forestall the evacuation of substantial forces to Sicily or Italy.[3]

Alexander directed Eighth Army to exert continuous pressure on its front, and to advance on the axis Enfidaville–Hammamet–Tunis in order to bar access to the Cap Bon peninsula. First Army was to capture Tunis, then aid U.S. II Corps in capturing Bizerte, and be prepared to aid the Eighth Army if the enemy should succeed in withdrawing onto the Cap Bon peninsula. British Eighth Army prepared to attack the Enfidaville line on the night of 19–20 April, an operation timed to draw enemy reinforcements to that portion of the front, where they were to be held by continued pressure.

West of the Eighth Army, at the southwestern corner of the enemy's bridgehead, British First Army had directed the French XIX Corps to attack on the axis Rebaa Oulad Yahia–Pont-du-Fahs in order to reopen the road and make possible progress toward Zarhouan. This mission involved the clearing of Djebel Chirich and Djebel Fkirine (988) on the south side of the road and Djebel Mansour on the north side of the road, an effort which was to be started only after the attack on each flank had reached a suitable stage.

British 9 Corps was to mount its attack from an area southwest of Bou Arada, with its objective the high ground adjacent to the Sebkret el Kourzia, northwest of Pont-du-Fahs. From this point 9 Corps could threaten the main highway between Pont-du-Fahs and Tunis, and could also assist British 5 Corps.

British 5 Corps was to make the main effort. It was first to regain Longstop Hill and "Peter's Corner" (southeast of Medjez el Bab on the Medjez el Bab–Massicault highway; *see Map VII*) and next to gain the high ground between El Bathan and Massicault. The attacks by British 9 and 5 Corps were both to be launched on 22 April, the former at daybreak and the latter shortly after dark.

On the northern flank, the U.S. II Corps was expected to advance eastward from Bédja to Chouïgui, and at the same time, nearer the northern coast, to expel the enemy from Bald and Green Hills (known as the Djefna position) and gain control of

[3] (1) 18 A Gp Opn Instruc 12, 16 Apr 43. AFHQ Micro Job 10A, Reel 6C. (2) Msg 2921, AFHQ G–3 to 18 A Gp, 10 Apr 43. (3) Patton Diary, 9, 11, and 12 Apr 43. (4) Alexander, "The African Campaign," p. 878. (5) Leahy, *I Was There*, p. 147, cites approving action by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the British Chiefs of Staff on 9 April 1943. (6) Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, pp. 72–73. (7) Msg, AGWAR to FREEDOM, 9 Apr 43. CM-OUT 5656.

The II Corps was to remain under 18 Army Group but with First Army authorized to issue directly the orders necessary for co-ordinating the corps' operations with those of First Army. In effect, First Army commanded II Corps in the name of the army group, but the Commanding General, II Corps, was free to bring any matter of serious disagreement to Alexander for decision.

high ground dominating a road junction northwest of Garaet Ichkeul.[4]

An elaborate Allied air forces' program to choke off the air supply line from Italy became effective during the planning. Known as Operation FLAX and postponed for various reasons since February, it began as the enemy came under attack in the Chott Position on 5 April. Two Allied flights struck formations of enemy transports en route to Tunisia over the Sicilian straits early that morning, while a little later B–17's hit the Bizerte and Tunis airdromes in an effort to catch those transports which got through. Other bombers went to Sicily to destroy any transport aircraft which might be staging there in a second flight en route from Italy to Tunisia. Fighter sweeps contributed to the whole operation, which may have destroyed as many as 161 aircraft on the ground and 40 in the air.[5]

The Western Desert Air Force soon afterward occupied bases from which its fighters could operate over the Golfe de Tunis and join in intercepting enemy air transports. On 18 April, five squadrons intercepted a mixed and scattered formation of Junkers 52's and Messerschmitt 323's at a very low altitude and already in sight of the coast, and striking from the right rear, destroyed thirty-eight of them.[6] Next day, a smaller success was achieved, and as the ground offensive began on 22 April, thirty-nine more enemy transports were intercepted and destroyed. Some burst into flames as if carrying cargoes of gasoline. Thereafter, the enemy limited his air supply route to night operations and to individual rather than formation flights.[7] Allied night fighters interfered with that method, too.

The Enemy's Plans and Regrouping

However desperate the Axis position might seem after the loss of the Chott Position, Hitler did not budge from his determination to hold on. On 8 April he had to confront Mussolini, now deeply concerned about the expected Allied invasion of Italy, when the Duce arrived at Schloss Klessheim, with an Italian delegation, for the annual conference of the Axis partners.

As in previous discussions with Goering and Ciano, Mussolini pleaded that Germany come to terms with the USSR and turn all its energies against the Allies in the Mediterranean. His plan for prevent-

[4] First Army Opn Instruc 37, 19 Apr 43, copy in II Corps AAR, 15 May 43. The order of battle for British First Army and U.S. II Corps was given as follows:

U.S. II Corps	1st Armored Division (less 1st Armored Regiment)
	1st Infantry Division
	9th Infantry Division
	34th Infantry Division
	Corps Franc d'Afrique (three battalions)
British 5 Corps	1st Infantry Division
	4th Infantry Division
	78th Infantry Division
	25th Tank Brigade (less 51st Royal Tank Regiment)
British 9 Corps	1st Armoured Division
	6th Armoured Division
	46th Infantry Division
	51st Royal Tank Regiment
French XIX Corps	Moroccan Division
	Algiers Division
	Oran Division
	Tank Battalion (Valentines and Somuas)
	18th King's Dragoon Guards

[5] AAF, History of the Twelfth Air Force, Operation FLAX, pp. 1–6. AAF Archives.

[6] MS # D–071 (Buchholz). Estimates then were seventy-four destroyed and twenty-nine damaged.

[7] (1) *Ibid.* (2) Info supplied by Air Ministry, London.

ing the Allied invasion of the European mainland was to hold in Tunisia and fall on the Allied forces from the rear by attacking through Spain and Spanish Morocco and seizing the Balearic Islands.

Hitler was interested only in holding in Tunisia. The conflict with the Soviets admitted of no compromise, and even if forces were available a move through Spain or a seizure of the Balearics would arouse the Spaniards to stubborn, unending resistance. The Axis could hold Tunisia indefinitely, and as long as the Allies were kept fighting there, they could not undertake other large-scale operations; Italy, Sicily, and the French Mediterranean coast were therefore in no immediate danger. In any case, the best Axis troops were in Tunisia and their evacuation was impossible. Mussolini had to be satisfied with the old assurance that Italy and Germany would stand or fall together. Hitler even induced him, in exchange for renewed promises of reinforcements, to agree to having the Italian cruisers and destroyers still in action used to transport men and materials to Tunisia—an agreement from which Mussolini began to retreat as soon as he reached the soberer atmosphere of his own headquarters in Rome.[8]

The Duce, conferring with Kesselring on 12 April after he got back from Germany, reiterated that the Axis had to get sufficient men, ammunition, replacement parts, and fuel to Tunisia without delay.

> We have to hold [he said] We can hold out two months. We must create a system of defense with one line behind another in depth I am convinced that the Americans will do nothing [elsewhere] before having settled the Tunisian problem. Only then will they eventually attack Sardinia, Sicily, Crete, etc. If we succeed in shifting the start of these attacks, we shall see that in the short time remaining before winter, they will do nothing Everything can happen if we persist, and therefore we shall hold.[9]

Army Group Africa prepared to hold out in conformity with the decision of the two Axis political leaders. All men in Tunisia were to be used either to fight or to construct field fortifications. Troops of the rear were placed under the general control of *Headquarters, Fifth Panzer Army,* and were to be assembled in units of 500 under command of energetic officers for commitment as needed. Motor vehicles were organized in transport columns of fifty-ton capacity and held at the disposal of the army group. The primitive Enfidaville line was to be developed in depth. Coastal defense as well as retention of interior sectors became the responsibility of the two Axis armies. After the front was firmly established, with German and Italian battalions interspersed, and with all Axis tanks and at least two armored divisions available for a mobile reserve, the armored forces were to be placed under the control of *Headquarters, German Africa Corps.* Italian tanks would pass to *Division Centauro,* which would in turn be attached to a German armored division.[10]

[8] (1) Ltr, Mussolini to Hitler, 26 Mar 43. (2) Tels, Mackensen to Ribbentrop, 31 Mar, 1 Apr 43. (3) *Aufzeichnung ueber die Unterredung: zwischen dem RAM und dem Staatssekretaer Bastiniani in Anwesenheit der Botschafter von Mackensen and Alfieri im Schloss Klessheim am 8. April 1943, nachmittags und am 9. April 1943 vormittags; zwischen dem RAM und Staatssekretaer Bastiniani im Schloss Klessheim am 9. April nachmittags; zwischen dem Fuehrer and Marschall Antonescu in Klessheim am 12. April um 5 Uhr nachmittags.* All in German Foreign Office Files, Historical Division, Dept of State. (4) *OKW/WFSt, KTB, 1.VII.–30.IX.43,* 15 Jul 43.

[9] Conf, Duce with Kesselring, 12 Apr 43, in Italian Collection, Item 26.

[10] Operation Order, *Army Group Africa, Nr. 2006/43,* dated 11 Apr 43, in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB mit Anlagan vom 11.IV–21.43.*

Kesselring reported to Mussolini on the situation in Tunisia on 17 April, directly after making his last personal visit there. The Axis line had been rendered satisfactory, he said, in all but two points: at Medjez el Bab and on the coastal plain near Enfidaville. Here General von Arnim was withdrawing the main line to stronger and more favorable positions and, while preparing a second line, was already planning a third. Axis reserves were being flown to Tunisia at a daily rate expected to average from 1,800 to 2,000 men, after a week in which air transports brought in 4,000, while destroyer-transports brought others at a slower rate. He would hold in Italy a pool of about 12,000 from which to draw. On 20 April, as a birthday gift to the Fuehrer, he planned to make an attack, despite some matériel shortages, especially in fuel. Allied aviation was ominously quiet but Allied airfields were being kept under close surveillance and were about to be subjected to Axis attacks. Although Allied tank strength was still greatest on the coastal plain in the southwest, Kesselring expected much of the British armor to be shifted to the north before the Allied attack began.[11]

The enemy's forward line was under steady and sometimes overwhelming Allied pressure as the main offensive was being prepared. At the northern end, the British 46th Division forced *Division von Manteuffel* to give ground so that when the U.S. 9th Infantry Division took over the British positions at 1800, 14 April, most of the area gained by Axis attacks since 26 February had already been recovered by the British. Just before the Allied attacks began on 19 April, that portion of the Axis front ran, therefore, from a cape north of Djebel Dardyss (294) through the Djefna position to the vicinity of Sidi Nsir. The *334th Division* (*Korpsgruppe Weber*) had successfully withstood the attacks of the British 4th Division toward Sidi Nsir and the hills south of it, but after stubborn defense northwest and north of Medjez el Bab, was pushed back from the crest of Djebel Bech Chekaoui (667) and neighboring heights. From these bold ridges Allied observers could keep "Longstop Hill" (290) under surveillance and see over it to the Medjerda river plain beyond.

East of Medjez el Bab and south of the main highway to Tunis, the *Hermann Goering Division* (−) held a section of the front extending to Djebel Mansour, in contact there with the right flank of the *German Africa Corps*. After the withdrawal into the Enfidaville Position, this corps had assumed command of the zone between the *Fifth Panzer* and *Italian First Armies* with the *Superga, 10th Panzer* and *21st Panzer Divisions,* and the remaining Italian troops of the *XXX Corps* and *50th Special Brigade.* Starting on 21 April the armored and mobile elements of the panzer divisions were gradually withdrawn from this sector which was mountainous. The *10th Panzer Division* (−) was initially moved to the Medjerda plain west of Tunis to serve as mobile *Fifth Panzer Army* reserve against the expected Allied thrust against Tunis.[12]

[11] Conf, Duce, Kesselring, and Ambrosio, 17, 20 Apr 43, in Italian Collection, Item 26.

[12] (1) Maps, *Lage Nordafrika (1:500,000) GenStdH/Op Abt IIIb, Pruef Nr. 19457* and *19629,* 18, 19 Apr 43. (2) Daily Rpts, *Army Group Africa* to *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt,* 19–21 Apr 43, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt, Tagesmeldungen H. Gr. Afrika vom 1.IV.–12.V.43* (cited hereafter as *Army Group Africa, Sitreps*). (3) Contemporary estimate at AFHQ of these units was as follows: *Division von Manteuffel,* 4,500; *334th Division,* 9,450; *Hermann Goering Division,* 10,000; *10th Panzer Division,* 10,000. Units of the *999th Division,* part of which was used to reinforce *Division von Manteuffel,* 5,800.

The southeastern portion of the bridgehead was defended by *Italian First Army,* with *XXI* and *XX Corps* headquarters. The *Spezia Division* was farthest inland, then the *164th Light Africa Division,* and on hills farther east, the *Pistoia, Young Fascists,* and *Trieste Divisions.* On the coastal plain was the *90th Light Africa Division,* with the *15th Panzer Division* under *Army Group Africa's* control in a second, supporting position southeast of Zarhouan. The remnants of the *Luftwaffe Parachute Brigade,* now commanded by a Major von der Heydte, the *19th Flak Division,* and *Division Centauro* were used to strengthen this part of the bridgehead's defense. German elements of *Italian First Army* were controlled through General Bayerlein. A *Bizerte Coast Defense Command* under Gen. Kurt Bassenge of the *20th Flak Division* furnished small units used in the northern sector but was principally concerned with operation of the coastal and antiaircraft guns used to defend that port and its neighboring airfield. The *Tunis Coast Defense Command* had similar duties.[13]

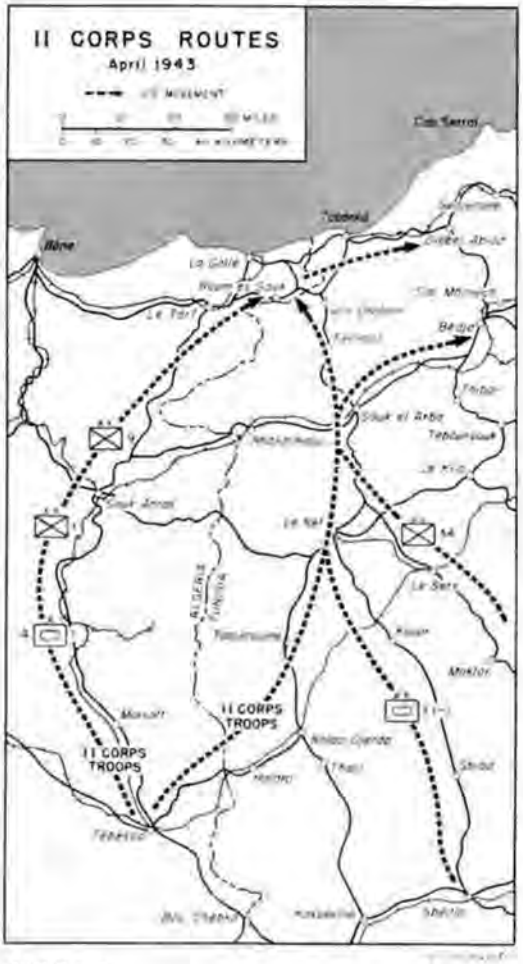
Allied Regrouping

Allied regrouping along the new line involved the transfer of a considerable force from the British Eighth Army on the coastal plain near Kairouan to the zone of British 9 Corps east of Le Kef, and the shifting of over 90,000 men of the U.S. II Corps from south central Tunisia to a new zone northeast of Bédja. Since it had been in prospect for nearly a month the movement by U.S. 9th Infantry Division to the northern end of the line of commitment under British 5 Corps was accomplished as soon as the fighting near El Guettar had ceased. The division moved northward in eastern Algeria along the main road between Tébessa and Souk Ahras, and thence northeastward through the cork forest near Tabarka and the village of Djebel Abiod to the hills near Sedjenane. (*Map 20*) The 47th Infantry Regiment began relieving elements of the British 46th Division on the night of 12–13 April. The decision to install the whole U.S. II Corps in that part of the Allied front was reached later and less firmly, so that planning and preparations to move it were more hurried. To regulate the heavy transverse movement of II Corps across the very active east-west supply routes of First Army, and to shift British armored troops from the east coast through the II Corps area to that of British 9 Corps, required a high degree of co-ordination between staffs of II Corps and of First Army. Most of the mileage covered by II Corps units lay within British First Army's zone, where a new corps area was not established until after the bulk of the American troops had arrived, and where all troop movements were under First Army's control.

Actual arrangements were preceded by a road reconnaissance in which representatives of the G–3, provost marshal, and Engineer sections of II Corps joined officers of the Movement Controls Branch, British First Army. They selected a route along which, it was believed, control points could be established and traffic be regulated to meet an average rate of 100 vehicles per hour.

The most direct route from Tébessa to Roum es Souk (about fifteen miles southwest of Tabarka and in the cork forest)

[13] Strength of the German units was estimated, 18 April, to be as follows: *15th* and *21st Panzer Divisions,* 5,600 each; *90th Light Africa Division,* 6,000; *164th Light Africa Division,* 3,000; *19th* and *20th Flak Divisions,* 13,000; *Marsch Battalions,* 14,930.



MAP 20

totaled about 140 miles. It ran through Haïdra to Tadjerouine to Le Kef, a road junction on an important British supply route from Souk Ahras eastward. North of Le Kef the second half of the route became twisting, narrow, and subject to poor visibility and to one-way traffic except at limited passing points. Bridges were narrow and grades often steep. At Souk el Arba, the route crossed the principal highway and railroad from Souk Ahras to Tunis, and continued through Fernana and Aïn Draham to the Roum es Souk area. The northbound traffic crossed the two major west-east highway and railroad routes, and made use of almost ten miles of one of these roads in approaching the road junction at Le Kef. The narrow road north of Le Kef was used alternately for traffic going in each direction. In order to make the fullest use of the time allowed for American northbound columns, the II Corps vehicles assembled near its southern terminus in numbers calculated to make fullest use of each allotted period, and to take advantage of any unscheduled additional opportunities.

Besides the 1st Infantry, 1st Armored, and 34th Infantry Divisions, the corps had to transfer its headquarters and approximately forty Ordnance, Medical, Quartermaster, Engineer, Chemical Warfare Service, and Signal units of varying size. The divisions were subdivided into combat teams, which along with the corps troops, were given priorities in a tentative schedule providing for 2,400 vehicles per day. Each day's contemplated movements were reported on the previous day through the British Movements Control liaison officer at Tébessa to Headquarters, First Army, which regulated traffic across its area to the vicinity of Roum es Souk. The II Corps assembled its units in the Tébessa area at those periods between 14 and 18 April which were best adapted to the whole volume of transportation within First Army's area, and fed them from these assembly points to the southern terminus of the main, one-way bottleneck. There the intermediate assembly served as a sort of reservoir, with earlier arrivals marching out as often and as long as the route farther north could be



MAJ. GEN. OMAR N. BRADLEY *(right) after he assumed command of U.S. II Corps and Lt. Gen. Kenneth A. N. Anderson, commander of the British First Army.*

held open, while others were arriving from the initial points of departure.[14]

The plan thus created was modified on army group instructions during 17 and 18 April, when all II Corps units were sent to Roum es Souk by the longer road which part of the 9th Infantry Division had used a week earlier, the one through Morsott, Souk Ahras, and Le Tarf, thus avoiding the congestion near Le Kef.[15] The 1st Infantry Division moved northward over this route on 18 April. The U.S. 1st Armored Division, leaving its Combat Command A to move by way of Morsott, started north behind the British 1st Armoured Division and King's Dragoon Guards. The division assembled near Sbeïtla and moved up the road through Sbiba to Le Kef on 19 April. The British column which preceded them had covered the characteristically tawny paint on 4,000 British Eighth Army vehicles with the dark green of First Army, and left the coastal plain in a wide southerly loop through Faïd pass, Sbeïtla, and Ksour to Le Kef. The 105 tank transporters which

[14] (1) Info supplied by Col Robert A. Hewitt, former G–3 II Corps. OCMH. (2) II Corps G–3 and G–4 Jnls, 12–23 Apr 43.

[15] (1) Msg 18 A Gp to First Army and II Corps, 2145, 16 Apr 43, Entry 65, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) 1st Div AAR.

had been placed at the head of the long column were released temporarily to supplement those of the U.S. 2622d Tank Transporter Company in moving Combat Command B, U.S. 1st Armored Division's medium tanks through Le Kef to a staging point near Rhardimaou. Meanwhile lighter elements of the division passed through Souk el Arba to the cork forest near Roum es Souk.[16]

The 34th Infantry Division, in order to avoid conflict with the British 6th Armoured Division in joint use of the road between Pichon and Maktar, was brought northward in two major sections, via Le Sers and east of Le Kef to Souk el Arba and the cork forest, on the nights of 21–22 and 23–24 April.[17]

Transfer of the bulk of II Corps to the northern zone required good administrative co-ordination but was not otherwise extraordinarily difficult. The marches were much shorter than those which many of the units had made in coming east into Tunisia from Algeria, and they were not made under air attacks of such strength and persistence that all traffic had to be done at night and under blackout conditions. The problems were principally to make effective use of all available transportation facilities and to avoid congestion at critical points. A more threatening difficulty was the provision of sufficient supply and maintenance to the II Corps in the new zone. Simultaneously with the northward shift of troops, II Corps had to accumulate a six days' level of supply at accessible forward dumps and to arrange for systematic resupply in the amount of 800 tons daily. Stocks in central Tunisia were allowed to dwindle, and a substantial quantity of ammunition was trucked from there to the vicinity of Djebel Abiod to meet initial requirements. On 20 April, out of a total requirement of 3,780 tons of ammunition, all but 1,123 were on hand or en route and the supply system was in order. Bône was the site of the Eastern Base Section's main depot on which II Corps was expected to draw. Railheads at Bédja, Sidi Mhimech a few miles northeast of it, and Djebel Abiod were to become the main corps supply points. Eastern Base Section and the G–4 section of II Corps under Col. Robert W. Wilson, worked in close co-operation, the former taking over forward dumps as soon as the attack moved eastward a few miles. To have on hand the means to begin the attack during the night of 22–23 April, all available trucks were used around the clock, with alternating crews, and with headlights as needed.[18]

The burden on Allied supply lines from the western Mediterranean was increased by the quantities they provided for the British Eighth Army. Stocks of gasoline held at Gafsa and Bou Chebka totaled 3,700 tons. Lighters began unloading supplies for the Eighth Army at Gabès on 3 April and small vessels at Sfax on 14 April. But a railhead for the Eighth Army at Sbeïtla was also scheduled to receive 500 tons per day from the west. When large units were shifted from the Eighth to the First Army before and

[16] 1st Armd Div FO 21, 0900, 19 Feb 43.

[17] 34th Div FO 34, 1700, 20 Apr 43, and Annex A (March table).

[18] (1) Memo, Ordnance Officer II Corps to CO EBS, 20 Apr 43, sub: Ammo sit at La Calle. (2) Both ammunition and gasoline consumption (68,633 gallons daily) ran under estimates, although some kinds of ammunition became scarce. Memo, G–4 II Corps for CofS II Corps, 30 Apr 43, in II Corps G–4 Jnl. (3) Msg EC–1011, EBS to FREEDOM, 21 Apr 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 123. (4) See Lt. Col. J. W. Smith, "Logistics As Seen From a Corps Level," *Military Review,* XXVI, No. 7 (October, 1946), pp. 58–62.

during the last battles, they drew rations and ammunition from the railroad through Le Kef to Bou Arada, or from the highway between Le Kef and Teboursouk at Le Krib.[19]

On 15 April, command of II Corps passed quietly from Patton to his deputy commander of the past six weeks, General Bradley. Patton returned to the planning for American participation in the invasion of Sicily (Operation HUSKY) as had been contemplated when he took command of the II Corps on 6 March. Bradley's earlier active participation in direction of the II Corps minimized the consequences of the shift. On 16 April, his headquarters moved from Gafsa to a newly established site near Bédja. The relief of the British units by the Americans and all road movements remained under control of British 5 Corps until 1800, 19 April, when Headquarters, II Corps, officially assumed command of its new area, with a forward line running from the ocean east of Cap Serrat to Hill 667, five miles west of Heïdous.[20]

As the time for the attack drew near, the Allied forces moved into battle position. General Alexander's headquarters shifted on 20 April to a point about fifteen miles southwest of Le Kef. General Anderson was already established in a farm near the White Fathers' monastery on the heights of Thibar, fifteen miles along the road from Bédja south to Teboursouk, and on the south side of the Medjerda river. General Bradley's command post was organized on 15 April two miles northwest of Bédja in tents on a farm belonging to the mayor. The corps commanders of First Army explained their respective plans at a conference at Thibar on 18 April, and next morning General Bradley went over plans with his staff and division commanders.[21]

[19] (1) Info supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (2) Msgs Q 419, Q 420, and Q (M) 130, 18 A Gp to FREEDOM, 16 May 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

[20] (1) II Corps AAR, 15 May 43. (2) Msg, 18 A Gp to FREEDOM, 19 Apr 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log. (3) Col. William B. Kean relieved General Hugh Gaffey as chief of staff, and Col. Robert A. Hewitt resumed his functions as G–3 as Colonel Lambert took command of Combat Command A, 1st Armored Division, in place of General McQuillin.

[21] (1) II Corps G–3 Jnl, 19–20 Apr 43. (2) Bradley, *A Soldier's Story,* p. 75.

CHAPTER XXXII

The Attack Begins

General Alexander's plan of attack encountered severe strain at the outset. The preliminary offensive begun by the reduced British Eighth Army on the night of 19–20 April proved difficult and costly. The southernmost positions in the Enfidaville line, which the enemy had converted into mere screening stations held by light forces while taking the main line back onto higher ground, gave way at once. The Allied bombardment of the past few days, culminating in five hours of intensive shelling, drove the Italian defenders off part of the objective and facilitated an advance north of Enfidaville in the zone near the coast. But the ranking German officer with the *Italian First Army,* General Bayerlein, was in a forward position, able to organize and control the shift of German forces to contain the penetration and thus to save the line in general on the western and mountainous sector. The Eighth Army captured Takrouna and the southern portion of Djebel Garci (412) about twelve miles to the west at such cost that Montgomery broke off the attack there and planned to pursue it only along the coast. Regrouping for this effort and related measures caused the Eighth Army's holding attack to be suspended late on 21 April for four days.[1] This suspension at the very time the other attacks were beginning was a serious departure from the army group's general plan. (*See Map 19.*)

An Axis attack in the sector of Goubellat began in the British First Army's zone while the 9 Corps and 5 Corps were organizing for their attacks of 22 April. It had the effect of a "spoiling attack," but was less disturbing to 18 Army Group than Montgomery's cessation of pressure at the southeast. The Axis attack was carried out by the *Hermann Goering Division* (–) on the night of 20–21 April. It was directed against the heights southeast and south of Medjez el Bab, with the southernmost flank along the edge of the Goubellat plain. Its mission was to lighten Allied pressure on adjacent sectors and disrupt Allied offensive preparations.

The attacking troops, under command of General Schmid, were organized into three groups. Just south of the main highway leading into Medjez el Bab, *Group Audorff* (*754th Grenadier Regiment* of the *334th Infantry Division*) had orders to attack toward "Grenadier Hill" (Djebel Bou Mouss, 250) with a reinforced infantry battalion. In the center, *Group Schirmer* (consisting of the *Parachute Regiment Hermann Goering* (–), reinforced by the *7th Panzer Regiment* (–) and supporting troops) had the mission of capturing Allied strongholds on the hills northwest of Goubellat while keep-

[1] (1) *German CoS, First Italian Army, KTB,* 11–14, 20–21 Apr 43, and *Anlage* Memo for the *KTB* dated 5 May 43. (2) Montgomery, *El Alamein to the Rio Sangro,* p. 96.

ing close contact with the first group. The third force, *Group Funk* (a battalion of the *Grenadier Regiment Hermann Goering*), was to protect the southern flank by advancing against the northern foothills of Djebel Rihane (720). As these forces pulled out of their positions to form for the attack, their place in the enemy's main line of resistance was temporarily taken by two companies of infantry and the *10th Motorcycle Battalion.*

Shortly before midnight 20–21 April the Germans jumped off. The attack, favored by surprise, initially wrought some confusion among British troops and penetrated the Allied lines along a twelve-mile sector to a depth of about five miles. But at daybreak, as the enemy ran up against the main British position, the drive stalled. British tanks and artillery moved in and forced the attackers back. After nightfall the Germans withdrew to their original lines. Although the enemy claimed to have taken over 300 prisoners and to have destroyed five batteries of artillery, about 80 trucks and motor vehicles, and seven tanks, at a price of over 300 casualties, he had not been able to deter the Allied offensive in this quarter, but had only subjected its beginnings to greater strain.[2]

British 9 Corps began its planned assault on 22 April when General Crocker sent the 46th Division (General Freeman-Attwood) to gain possession of the high ground west of the Sebkret el Kourzia.

The enemy made the best possible use of the terrain he held by defending all major hills in strength and by blocking the approaches with extensive mine fields. The sector under attack was held by two battalions of the *Grenadier Regiment Hermann Goering* and, to the south of the Bou Arada–Pont-du-Fahs road, by a reconnaissance unit and a *Tunis Battalion* under *Headquarters, Regiment Ewert.* Two German and two Italian artillery battalions and units of the *Flak Regiment Hermann Goering,* in an antitank role, were in support. The spoiling attack of 20–21 April had confirmed the enemy in his assumption that the Allied offensive was imminent.[3] When therefore the attack of the British 46th Division jumped off after an extraordinarily heavy artillery preparation, the Germans were ready and offered determined resistance. South of the Sebkret el Kourzia they managed to hold. But north of the marsh, the British successfully penetrated the enemy defense line. Here, late on 23 April, General Crocker committed his 6th Armoured Division to exploit toward the Pont-du-Fahs–Tunis road. General Keightley's armor rolled into the opening and broke through, forcing the remaining elements of the *Grenadier Regiment* back onto the hills to the east. The 6th Armoured Division rounded the northern edge of the salt lake and one element drove ahead toward Pont-du-Fahs. Thus the German front had been pierced. The *German Africa Corps'* northwest flank was immediately threatened, and beyond it the entire

[2] (1) *Gefechtsbericht der Division Hermann Goering fuer die Zeit v.16.IV.–1.V.43, 1. Teil,* dated 5 May 43, in Folder CRS No. 77513/4. (2) Daily Rpt, *Army Group Africa, Ic* to *OB SOUTH,* 21 Apr 43, in *OBS/Fuehr Abt Ic, Heeresgruppe Afrika,* Feb–May 43 (cited hereafter as *Army Group Africa, G–2 Rpts*). (3) Morning Rpt, 22 Apr 43, *ibid.* (4) Noon Rpt, *OB SOUTH* to *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt,* 21 Apr 43, and G–2 Rpt, *Comando Supremo* to *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt,* 21 Apr 43, both in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt, Meldungen des Ob Sued v. 1.III.–30.IV.43, Band II.*

[3] (1) *Gefechtsbericht der Division Hermann Goering fuer die Zeit v. 16.IV.–1.V.43, 1. Teil,* dated 5 May 43. (2) MS #T–3 (Nehring *et al.*), Vol. 3a.

southern front along the Enfidaville Position appeared in danger.

Army Group Africa met the crisis by ordering a withdrawal in the sector of the *Africa Corps* opposite the French XIX Corps and relinquished control over the Djebels Mansour (678), Chirich (717), and Fkirine (988) in favor of a shorter defense line nearer Pont-du-Fahs.[4] Simultaneously, von Arnim ordered the *German Africa Corps* to extend its front to include the crumbling south wing of the *Hermann Goering Division* and sent *Fifth Panzer Army*'s only mobile reserve, the *10th Panzer Division* (—) into the breach. Here, under the *German Africa Corps,* the division was soon engaged in a prolonged seesaw battle with General Keightley's tanks. During the following days the embattled armor was fought to a standstill in the area east and northeast of the Sebkret el Kourzia in the vicinity of a dominating hill known to the Germans as "Kamelberg." [5]

Losses on both sides were heavy. For the period from 20–26 April *Army Group Africa* claimed to have destroyed 162 British tanks, 24 guns, 67 motor vehicles, and 23 planes.[6] After the first two days of battle, the *10th Panzer Division* had been reduced to 25 operational tanks. But reinforcements, drawn from the *First Italian Army* and *15th Panzer Division,* increased its strength by 26 April to 55 German and 10 Italian tanks. At the same time *Fifth Panzer Army* held another tank force of about 15 tanks in support of the *334th Infantry Division,* and nearer the Medjerda river.[7]

As the enemy braced himself to meet a resumption of the Allied attack, he found his capabilities seriously reduced. The fuel situation imposed a critical limitation on maneuver and troop transport, while the ammunition shortage threatened to reach dangerous proportions if strong Allied attacks in the south should be resumed. For the time being, however, the Axis counterbalanced its heavy expenditures on the western front with forces withdrawn from the sector opposite Montgomery as he suspended his attack against the Enfidaville Position.[8]

[4] The withdrawal was executed under some pressure from the French XIX Corps, especially in the Kebir river valley. During the night of 24–25 April the *Africa Corps* completed the movements in good order. In the process General Cramer reorganized his forces. He switched the *21st Panzer Division* from the south to the northwest, near the breakthrough area at Pont-du-Fahs. The *Superga Division* took up positions on the southwestern slopes of Djebel Zarhouan (1295), and *Group Schmidt,* a composite force consisting of the remaining immobile elements of the *10th Panzer* and *21st Panzer Divisions,* held the eastern portion of the new defense line to the boundary with the *First Italian Army.*

[5] Djebel Bou Keurnine (396), about three miles east-northeast of Sebkret el Kourzia, was named "Camelback Mountain" for its characteristic silhouette. (1) Second Intermediate and Daily Rpt, *Army Group Africa* to *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt, 24 Apr 43,* in *Army Group Africa, Sitreps.* (2) MS # T–3 (Nehring *et al.*) Vol. 3a.

[6] Rpt, *Army Group Africa, Ic,* to *OB SOUTH,* 26 Apr 43, in *OKH/GenStH/Op Abt, Meldungen des Ob Sued v. 1.III.–30.IV.43, Band II.*

[7] Daily Rpt, *Army Group Africa* to *OKH/GenStH/Op Abt,* 26 Apr 43, in *Army Group Africa, Sitreps.*

[8] The *10th Panzer* and *15th Panzer Divisions* were down to about one half of one unit of consumption, limiting their operations to a radius of about thirty miles. The remaining armored units and the two armies were reduced to about one quarter of a unit of consumption. At the prevailing rate of ammunition expenditure the army group estimated its ability to sustain operations as follows: for small arms, three days; for light artillery, five to six days; for medium artillery, three days; for heavy artillery, one to two days; and for antitank units, four days. Rations were sufficient to last through at least another week. Daily Rpts, *Army Group Africa* to *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt,* 23–25 Apr 43, in *Army Group Africa, Sitreps.*

The British 9 Corps offensive of 22–26 April against the *Hermann Goering Division* and the *10th Panzer Division* fell short of a break-through. But to prevent it, *Army Group Africa* had been forced to commit almost all of its mobile reserve, to withdraw from the salient opposite the French XIX Corps, and to expend a critical amount of its dwindling supplies. Thus the attack in the southern portion of the British First Army's zone had not only gained valuable ground, but inflicted crippling blows.

British 5 Corps (General Allfrey) began its operations nearer the Medjerda river with a preliminary attack on 21 April to retake Longstop Hill (290) after four months of German occupancy. The attempt was resisted for five days with fierce determination by elements of the enemy's *756th Mountain Regiment* (reinforced) of the *334th Division*, but the attacking troops of the 78th Division (General Evelegh) made their way doggedly along the ridge from southwest to northeast, much as in late December 1942, except that this time they remained after gaining control of the northeastern tip on 24 April.[9] (*See Map 7.*) The northern flank of Evelegh's division fought along the loftier Djebel el Ang (668), where the struggle for the ridges near Heïdous had ebbed and flowed for a week.

South of the Medjerda, the British 1st Division (Maj. Gen. W. E. Clutterbuck) and the British 4th Division (Maj. Gen. J. L. I. Hawkesworth) made the principal attack toward Massicault on 23 April. Here the British were opposed by the *754th Grenadier Regiment* (*Group Audorff*) and the *501st Heavy Panzer Battalion* (reinforced). Grich el Oued, where in December one unit had been surrounded by mire as the attack ended, fell into British possession as these enemy units fell back through Peter's Corner. This road junction, where the routes from Medjez el Bab and from Goubellat to Massicault converge about eight miles from Medjez el Bab, was firmly defended. Mine fields covered by artillery, mortar, and heavy machine gun fire slowed the Allied advance, which got as far as Djebel Bou Aoukaz (226) near the river, and Ksar Tyr on the south flank. There the British were stopped by elements of the *Hermann Goering Division* on 26 April.

But the critical sector was in the area of Djebel Bou Aoukaz, scene of some of the early fighting in Tunisia in December 1942. On 24 April *Army Group Africa* realized that the Allied main effort toward Tunis must be expected south of the Medjerda river. Just as soon as the British 9 Corps attack north and east of the Sebkret el Kourzia had been stopped, von Arnim merged nearly all his remaining armored units into one composite force, *Panzer Brigade Irkens*.[10] He entrusted his most capable tank leader, Colonel Irkens, commander of the *8th Panzer Regiment, 15th Panzer Di-*

[9] (1) Info supplied by British Cabinet Office, London. (2) Morning Rpt, *Army Group Africa* to *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt*, 25 Apr 43, in *Army Group Africa, Sitreps.*

[10] *Group Irkens* initially consisted of all available elements of *7th Panzer Regiment, 10th Panzer Division; 8th Panzer Regiment, 15th Panzer Division; 5th Panzer Regiment, 21st Panzer Division; 501st Heavy Panzer Battalion, 47th Grenadier Regiment;* one German and one Italian artillery battalion; and two Flak battalions, in addition to the remnants of *Group Audorff*, all together armed with somewhat less than 70 tanks. (1) Daily Rpt, *Fifth Panzer Army* to *Army Group Africa, Anlage C*, 28 Apr 43, in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB, Anlagen, Teile, 7.11.–28.IV.43.* (2) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB des Pz. AOK 5/ANF (Armee Nachrichten Fuehrer) fuer die Zeit 16.–30.IV.43*, 27 Apr 43. (3) MS # T–3 (Nehring *et al.*), Vol. 3a.

vision, with the command. On 28 and 29 April *Group Irkens,* under the personal supervision of the *Fifth Panzer Army* commander General von Vaerst, once more wrested the initiative from the British attackers, regained control of the dominating heights of Djebel Bou Aoukaz and stopped the British 5 Corps advance. In these battles which raged from 27–30 April, the Germans claimed to have destroyed 90 Allied tanks. When the Germans took count of their remaining armor, they reported a total of 69 operational tanks including 4 Tigers on 1 May. They had won a Pyrrhic victory since the Axis force had immobilized itself by expending all the available fuel. The small amounts of gasoline that arrived in Tunisia thereafter came by air and had to be sent directly to the units at the front to meet their most urgent needs. Army depots were empty, except for minute quantities held in iron reserve.

Generals von Arnim and von Vaerst now assigned to *Group Irkens* the most critical sector, that between the Medjerda river and the Medjez el Bab–Tunis highway. This narrowed the *334th Infantry Division's* zone to the north. Irkens' command was reinforced by the remaining elements of the *15th Panzer Division.* The reconnaissance battalions of the *Hermann Goering Division* and *10th Panzer Division* were withdrawn from the line, the former to bolster von Manteuffel's sector in the north, the latter to become *Army Group Africa's* only remaining reserve. Thus the Allied attacks had reduced von Arnim's reserves to one armored battalion. The *First Italian Army,* meanwhile, proved strong enough for its mission of holding the Enfidaville position despite the substantial transfers needed to enable the hard-pressed units of the *Fifth Panzer Army* to block the direct Allied thrust on Tunis.[11]

The II Corps Plans

General Bradley had devised a plan of attack to meet the directive that II Corps make its main effort in the southern part of its sector. The 18 Army Group conceived the II Corps mission as initially merely to guarantee the security of the British 5 Corps northern flank while the latter made the principal Allied attack along the Medjerda river. The corps therefore placed major emphasis on the effort by the U.S. 1st Infantry Division to gain control of the high ground between the Sidi Nsir–Mateur road and the Tine river valley, and of the hills rising on the southern side of that valley as far as the watershed between it and the Medjerda. The southwestern approaches to Mateur and the hills adjacent to Chouïgui pass (from the Tine valley to the coastal plain near Tebourba) were ultimate objectives in this part of the II Corps zone. (*Map XI*) The 9th Infantry Division was expected simultaneously to threaten Mateur from the west and to close the roads west of the Garaet Ichkeul. In general, the 1st Infantry Division was to move through the zone of Blade Force's late November thrust and the 9th Infantry Division was to circumvent the barriers on the Sedjenane–Mateur highway which the British 36th Brigade Group had then found impregnable.

In its plan of approach to Mateur and Chouïgui, II Corps applied the lessons so painfully learned during recent weeks farther south. The upper Tine river valley was a tempting route, for the terrain near the

[11] Rpts, *Army Group Africa* to *OKH/GenStd-H/Op Abt,* 24 Apr–1 May 43, in *Army Group Africa, Sitreps.*

river banks, despite the lack of good roads, promised smoother transit for vehicles than the hillsides. But the valley here consisted of several broad alluvial plains connected by narrowing gaps between closely adjacent hills, and it was labeled "The Mousetrap." The enemy could be expected to convert this route into a succession of positions in which he could fully exploit his defensive advantages. Mine fields, antitank and artillery positions, and observation posts would be in readiness and would enable the enemy to subject any attacking force to ruinous losses. Instead, therefore, of fighting the enemy with co-ordinated infantry, artillery, and armor on terrain where he might be most efficient, the II Corps chose to fight him on the hills where he might be weaker but where the terrain almost precluded the use of Allied armor, as well as being a serious obstacle to rapid advance by other arms. After initially occupying the hills west of the Tine river's headwaters, the Americans would seize the high ground on either side of the valley, thus avoiding The Mousetrap until ground from which it could be dominated had been brought into American control, and mines had been cleared from routes along the stream. Then the U.S. 1st Armored Division would be employed in a swift thrust toward Mateur. The 9th Infantry Division (reinforced) was also to be sent over the northern hills rather than along the lower ground in its zone as it set about the task of flanking and cutting off the Djefna position.

The enemy had had months to develop strongly some of his most advantageously situated defensive positions. He had excavated dugouts with pneumatic drills, and had strengthened them with concrete. Defiles between hills and approaches up the slopes and in the draws were freely sown with antipersonnel mines. Routes likely to be used by American patrols, and good points of observation which the enemy would have to evacuate as he retired, were also heavily mined. The 47th Infantry, for example, found one small area of 50 by 100 feet in which as many as 600 mines had been placed.[12]

American superiority in artillery was to be exploited fully. The corps, including the weapons of the cannon companies, had 24 heavy, 72 medium, and 228 light artillery pieces. Allotted to the 1st Infantry Division's initial attack were its own three battalions of 105-mm. howitzers and one battalion of 155-mm. howitzers supplemented by the corps artillery of six battalions of 105-mm. (of which five were armored), three battalions of 155-mm. howitzers, and two battalions of 155-mm. field guns (less one battery). The 9th Infantry Division had four battalions of 105-mm. howitzers (of which one was armored), two battalions of 155-mm. howitzers, and one battery of 155-mm. guns.[13]

Preparations for the Attack in the North

U.S. II Corps opened its attack during the early hours of 23 April with a tremendous artillery preparation. In some respects, the ensuing operations were simultaneous but nonetheless distinguishable and to some degree independent, with but a very thin connection between the northern attack by the U.S. 9th Infantry Division (reinforced) under General Eddy and the southern advance by the U.S. 1st Infantry Division (reinforced) under General Allen. The 9th Infantry Division's attack will be con-

[12] 47th Inf Hist, 1943.
[13] II Corps AAR, 15 May 43, par. 42.



DJEFNA AREA, *looking east to the plains of Mateur.*

sidered first and then the one by General Allen's troops.

General Eddy's forces, the 39th, 47th, and 60th Infantry Regiments, and the Corps Franc d'Afrique (CFA), with supporting units, all participated from the start. Their mission, it should be remembered, was to reduce the enemy's strongly fortified Djefna position on Green and Bald Hills astride the Djebel Abiod–Mateur highway and railroad, and to gain control of the road along the western edge of the Garaet Ichkeul.[14] The divisional zone extended inland from a point on the coast east of Cap Serrat for over twenty miles. Two means of approach toward the objectives crossed this area from southwest to northeast. The improved highway and railroad which ran through the narrow valley between Green Hill and Bald Hill under the guns of the Djefna position used the first approach route, and an unimproved track about half-

[14] (1) 9th Div AAR, 11 Apr–8 May 43, 10 Sep 43, and 39th, 47th, and 60th AAR's. (2) Giraud Hq, Rapport des opérations, pp. 52–53. (3) The Corps Franc d'Afrique (under 4,000 men) was established by General Giraud as a special unit intended to utilize all elements in French North Africa—politically active French subjects, non-French refugees, natives and Jews under restrictions—who could not readily be put in the regular French Army. They had already fought as part of British First Army, in British uniforms. General de Monsabert had originally commanded the Corps Franc d'Afrique. Memo by Maj Leon E. Dostert, AFHQ Liaison Sec, 26 Mar 43. Joint Rearmament Committee 320/004, DRB AGO.

way between this route and the seacoast used the second. The Sedjenane and Malah river valleys, through which those shallow streams flowed into the Garaet Ichkeul, separated three belts of rough terrain, covered by major hills and ridges and cut transversely by many shorter valleys, fringed with deep draws and gulches. The resulting topography was a jumbled series of hills dominated by high crests, of which six towered so boldly above the remainder that they became the keys to successful operations in their vicinity. North of the Sedjenane river was the Djebel Dardyss (294). Between the Sedjenane and the Malah were "Big Aïnchouna" (438) and "Little Aïnchouna" (432); Djebel el Akrat (513) was in the southwestern sector; and at the northeast was one of several Kef en Nsours in Tunisia (Hill 523). This Kef en Nsour was so placed at the western edge of Garaet Ichkeul that it furnished excellent observation over movement in either the Sedjenane or Malah river valleys or toward Mateur. Within the 9th Infantry Division zone, no north-south road of consequence existed west of that which skirted Garaet Ichkeul at the eastward base of Kef en Nsour. Where that road swung easterly toward Bizerte, it crossed a stream bed, the Douimis river, and then entered a narrow shelf at the base of the Djebel Cheniti, an advantageous position from which to oppose an attacking force. The area to be traversed by General Eddy's command was somewhat to the east of the principal rain forest of the north coast but was extensively covered with thick brush, much of it about five feet high and so dense as to impede contact even within small units.

The 9th Division could not advance along the southern edge of its zone to attempt envelopment of the Djefna position except over very rough ground and under good enemy observation. The 47th Infantry was therefore sent forward nearer the road to engage in holding attacks while a flanking movement was tried at the north. The 39th Infantry was there expected to slip by Green Hill in order to cut communications between the Djefna position and Mateur or Bizerte, while the 60th Infantry advanced along a still more northerly path before swinging to the southeast for the same purpose. The Corps Franc d'Afrique was to seize Kef en Nsour. For the 47th Infantry's attack toward the Djefna position, the 84th and 185th Field Artillery Battalions, and four 155-mm. guns of Battery C, 36th Field Artillery Battalion, with the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion (after 26 April), were committed in support. For the push farther north on either side of the Sedjenane valley by the 39th and 60th Infantry, the 9th Reconnaissance Troop reconnoitered the south side and the 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion, the north side of the river. The 26th, 34th, and 60th Field Artillery Battalions and the 62d Armored Field Artillery Battalion, and units of the 434th Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion furnished supporting fires for these two regiments and for the Corps Franc d'Afrique. Enough flexibility was retained between the two artillery groups to permit mutual support when needed.[15]

General Eddy's division faced the main body of *Division von Manteuffel.* In the north, the *962d Infantry Regiment* defended the sector from the coast to the hills south of the Sedjenane river valley with four battalions. Next to it, the *160th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* held a nine-mile zone with another three battalions. Von Manteuf-

[15] 9th Div AAR, 10 Sep 43.

fel's third regiment, *Barenthin*, was still farther south, opposite the U.S. 1st Infantry Division. In the hills which the 9th Infantry had to win were therefore initially seven enemy infantry battalions. On 27 and 28 April two Italian units and two German reconnaissance battalions would raise this figure to a total of nine battalion-size units. Effective combat strength of all of these forces was approximately 5,000 men, about one fourth of whom were Italians.[16]

Enemy artillery positions had been carefully and correctly spotted by British and American reconnaissance before the attack began. Two 170-mm. guns, a battery of 150-mm. guns and another of 105-mm. howitzers, and nearest the front, some self-propelled 75-mm. howitzers, faced the southern part of the attacking force, while opposite the northern elements were another battery of 105-mm. and a few 75-mm. howitzers. Some of these weapons were to be shifted to the north after the attack had been in progress for a few days, and six or more 88-mm. dual-purpose guns were then brought forward, but at the beginning of the attack the Americans knew where to direct neutralizing counterbattery fire. British intelligence had also mapped the enemy's works at the Djefna position as well as at the head of the Sedjenane valley, thus assisting the 9th Infantry Division to undertake an enveloping movement to avoid the prepared positions.[17]

General Eddy's command planned not only to work around the enemy's stronger positions but in doing so to make full use of the preponderance of American over Axis artillery. That superiority was very large, for the attacking forces had eighty-three artillery pieces plus antitank and antiaircraft weapons. Antiaircraft protection of gun positions, command posts, and the Djebel Abiod–Sedjenane road was furnished by one battery each from the 67th and 107th, and by the entire 434th Coast Artillery (AA) Battalion. For reconnaissance and antitank protection, in addition to the 9th Reconnaissance Troop, the 91st Reconnaissance

[16] Headquarters, *962d Infantry Regiment*, was technically part of the *999th Infantry Division* whose commander was shot down during his flight to Tunisia. Division headquarters was never organized. Within the sector of the *962d Infantry Regiment* were initially the remnants of the *10th Bersaglieri Regiment* amounting to a battalion, and by 27 April, the *5th Bersaglieri Regiment*, and *Battalion Grado* of the *San Marco Regiment* (Marines), which had been pulled out of the *Africa Corps* sector earlier; the *2d Battalion, 962d Infantry Regiment;* the *11th Parachute Engineer Battalion* (Witzig); and the *Deutsch-Arabische Lerh Abteilung (German-Arabian Training Battalion)* which was the only unit that was left of the *Regimental Command of German-Arabian Troops.* The command had been organized into the *Moroccan, Algerian, 1st* and *2d Tunisian*, and the *Training Battalions.* The volunteer battalions, two of them on camels, proved unreliable and were converted to labor battalions, then disbanded. The *Headquarters, 160th Panzer Grenadier Regiment*, controlled the *1st* and *4th Tunis Battalions* and the *30th Africa Battalion. Regiment Barenthin* consisted of three organic battalions. The two battalions sent to reinforce Manteuffel were the *Reconnaissance Battalion, Hermann Goering Division*, and the *334th Reconnaissance Battalion.* (1) Daily Rpts, *Fifth Panzer Army* to *Army Group Africa*, 27–28 Apr 43, in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB (Teile) mit Anlagen (7.II.–28.IV.43), 27.IV.–28.IV.43, Afrika.* (2) *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB, Anlagen, Id–Akten zu KTB I–V, 29.XI.1942–4.III.1943.* (3) Maps, *Lage v. Manteuffel* (1: 50,000) and *Fifth Panzer Army* (1: 200,000) in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB, Anlagen*, Folder containing four maps and miscellaneous documents, 29 Apr 43. (4) MS #D-001 (von Vaerst). (5) Maps, Phases of the Battle for Bizerte, in II Corps AAR, 15 May 43. (6) For the strength figure of *Division von Manteuffel* see *Div von Manteuffel, KTB 2, 1.I.–3.III.43.*

[17] (1) 9th Div AAR, 10 Sep 43; (2) WD, Lessons from the Tunisian Campaign, 15 Oct 43, p. 13.

Squadron and two tank destroyer battalions were attached.[18]

The Attack in the North Begins

As the attack opened on 23 April the Corps Franc d'Afrique and the 60th Infantry on the north side of the Sedjenane river, the 39th Infantry opposite Djebel Aïnchouna (Hills 432 and 438), and the 47th Infantry south of the Sedjenane–Mateur road and railroad, started for their objectives at 0530. The 60th Infantry at the north and the 47th Infantry at the south easily reached their D–Day objectives and continued further eastward. The Corps Franc d'Afrique ran into trouble. Against stronger resistance, the 39th Infantry in the center sought even less successfully to occupy its objective, Djebel Aïnchouna, from a base on the Djebel el Garsia (295), to the west of it. The 1st and 3d Battalions, 39th Infantry, moved to a line of departure at the base of Hill 432 during the previous night, and attacked with the 3d Battalion on the right. The 1st Battalion achieved the crest of Hill 432 and tried to swing along the ridge to the higher summit of Hill 438, stretching off to the northeast. A counterattack on its left rear in the latter part of the afternoon arrested its progress. The 3d Battalion reached a point about half a mile south of Hill 432, and then tried to get on to the hill itself through dense underbrush and over steep rocky crevasses and cliffs. One company got only as far as the base of its objective; the rest were farther back.

Control of the regiment was disrupted by the intrusion on Djebel el Garsia of an enemy force of approximately 150 men which cut off and captured the regimental commander, Col. J. Trimble Brown, his executive officer, the commanding officer of his 2d Battalion, and a small force stationed at the regimental observation post. One American group shot its way out. Then Company G, 39th Infantry, cut off the enemy and freed several other Americans while capturing some Germans, and killing or wounding about forty-five more. Papers which the enemy seized at the observation post were not recovered.[19] The first day's attack by the 9th Infantry Division thus ended with its main thrust in the center frustrated and with the enemy organizing his defense more strongly.

Casualties and confusion, moreover, jeopardized chances of a successful renewal of the attack next day. During the night, 23–24 April, Brig. Gen. Donald A. Stroh, the assistant division commander, took temporary command of the 39th Infantry Regiment pending the arrival of the new commanding officer, Col. William L. Ritter. The regiment got set for a hard fight next day. And they had such a fight. It was not until the afternoon of 25 April that Hill 438 was held by the two battalions, after both had worked their way along the ridge. The 1st Battalion in the lead had lost its commander, executive officer, intelligence officer, and heavy weapons company commander, and on 24

[18] (1) 9th Div AAR, 10 Sep 43, App. C. (2) For the 9th Infantry Division the density of artillery was estimated at one piece per 630 yards of front. Memo, Col Kean for CG AGF, 17 May 43, sub: Obsr's rpt on II Corps 21–26 Apr 43. Copy in OPD 381 Africa Sec 5, Case 124. (3) The American preponderance in artillery was not only in the number of guns but in the volume of fire which they delivered. A total of 40,576 field artillery rounds, of which 10 percent was smoke shell, was reported expended in 9th Div AAR, 10 Sep 43, Annex 2, p. 2.

[19] (1) 39th Inf AAR, 15 Apr–9 May 43, 27 Jun 43, and 39th Inf Jnl. (2) Msg 38, 23 Apr 43, in 9th Div G–3 Jnl. (3) 9th Div AAR, 10 Sep 43, App. C, p. 5.

April was severely reduced by casualties and straggling. But it had pushed on, with the 3d Battalion south of it, to occupy the crest and two principal shoulders, and to get ready for any enemy counterattack.

On 26 April, the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry, continued the attack southeast of Djebel Aïnchouna along a second ridge with its peak at Hill 513. Meeting slight resistance, it was able to continue on 27 April to another ridge about four miles beyond Djebel Aïnchouna to the east. There the enemy was found in strength, and was engaged first by an advance platoon of Company G, next by the rest of the company, and, after considerable artillery fire on the enemy's mortars and presumed positions on the northeastern slopes, by the rest of the 2d Battalion. The whole battalion was soon under fire from what it identified as six 88-mm. guns to the east-southeast at Sidi Bou Zitouna. Heavy machine gun fire from a hill to the south soon supplemented that of the 88's. The battalion was at the end of a tortuous line of supply, with mules picking up from motor traffic, and with two to three miles of hand-carrying beyond the "mulehead." It was advised to dig in and hold its positions. Thus at the conclusion of four days of fighting, the 39th Infantry in the center of the 9th Infantry Division's attack had been stopped about two miles north of Green Hill, northern anchor of the Djefna position. There the regiment remained for the next four days.[20]

The 47th Infantry's mission south of the 39th Infantry was to keep up a continuous aggressive demonstration in front of the Djefna position in an effort to keep the defenders pinned down, while farther to the north the 39th and 60th Infantry advanced on flanking missions to try to cut them off. After initial success in seizing the hills nearest the line of departure, the troops met resistance, principally in the form of enemy artillery fire and combat patrols. The enemy expended his artillery ammunition parsimoniously and never in concentrations exceeding six weapons. After three days, orders from II Corps were to keep pushing eastward "until you draw something." [21] For its part the 1st Battalion, 47th Infantry, executed this order by working forward as far as a group of hills southwest of Bald Hill, of which the highest was Hill 598. On the afternoon of 26 April, strong fire revealed the enemy's presence there in force. The 3d Battalion (Capt. Gordon H. Sympson), operating north of the road and railroad in a narrowing zone, moved to Hill 398, near the western limit of an open area at the base of Green Hill, and sent patrols through the area. One patrol eventually reported going as far as the western slope of Green Hill. Contact with the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry, to the north was lost during this phase.

While the 39th Infantry was painfully wresting the vantage point of Djebel Aïnchouna from the enemy, and the 47th Infantry slowly approached the enemy's main position, the 60th Infantry's simultaneous attack on the other side of the Sedjenane river progressed more readily. The terrain rather than the enemy presented the major difficulties. The relatively speedy advance by the 60th Infantry could be attributed in part to the determination and courage of its men. One outstanding example was Sgt. William L. Nelson, who commanded a sec-

[20] 39th Inf AAR, and 39th Inf Jnl, 1752–1808, 27 Apr 43.

[21] (1) 47th Inf Hist, 1943. (2) 9th Div AAR, 10 Sep 43.

tion of heavy mortars needed desperately to check an enemy counterattack at Djebel Dardyss (Hill 294) on the second day. Under intense fire, he crawled to a good observation post from which to direct on the enemy concentrations of such effectiveness that they brought the German counterattack to a halt. The enemy then tried to drive Nelson off and wounded him mortally with hand grenades. Through the fire which swept the area, he nevertheless crawled farther toward a more exposed but still more effective point of observation from which his direction of fire resulted in further weakening the opposition to the American assault. Djebel Dardyss remained in American possession.[22] On 25 April, the 60th Infantry had run ahead of its supplies and stopped to permit the accumulation of necessary matériel in forward dumps, as rapidly as donkeys and burros could bring it. The Corps Franc d'Afrique had experienced severe difficulties at Hill 107, about three miles north of Djebel Dardyss, and by 25 April clearly required reinforcement and stronger support to overcome the enemy units in its path of advance.[23] The 60th Infantry was therefore deflected northeastward from its original route. It was directed to outflank from the south the enemy occupying Djebel Touro (499) and the adjacent high ground through which the French must pass to reach the final group of hills north of Garaet Ichkeul. Kef en Nsour thus also became an objective for the 60th Infantry. By 26 April, the 9th Infantry Division was adapting its attack to local situations and accepting a substantial delay in the original tentative schedule of advance.

The II Corps Southern Attack Begins

The southern portion of the II Corps front, that initially held by the 1st Infantry Division, reinforced, extended southeasterly about fourteen miles from the vicinity of Djebel Grembil (499), west of Sidi Nsir, to that of Djebel Bech Chekaoui (667), five miles west of Heïdous. The northern limit of this zone of attack stretched to the northeast along the heights between the Malah and Djoumine rivers, while the southern edge extended toward Tebourba and Djedeïda, along the crest of Djebel Lanserine (569). Like the 9th Infantry Division zone, that of the 1st Infantry Division embraced two river valleys which trended generally northeastward and three belts of ridges and hills on either side of the two valleys. The Tine river flowed through alluvial basins wide enough at most points to furnish a substantial gap between the southern belt of rough terrain and that in the center. The center section was so irregular and so strongly occupied as to require from the beginning of the attack the full strength of the 1st Infantry Division. The northern flank along the Djoumine river was therefore protected by Company B, 81st Reconnaissance Battalion, which maintained contact with the 91st Armored Reconnaissance Squadron on the southern flank of the 9th Infantry Division, and by the 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry, temporarily attached to the 1st Infantry Division. The southern wing of the 1st Division sector was taken over by the 6th Armored Infantry (less the 2d Battalion). This unit had relieved a battalion of the 18th Infantry on Djebel Bech Che-

[22] For this heroic exploit, Sergeant Nelson was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

[23] Reported by a German prisoner of war to be one battalion of four companies, each consisting of 84 men with 10 mortars and 42 machine guns. Msg, 25 Apr 43, Entry 80, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.



PACK ANIMAL BRINGING SUPPLIES *up the mountainous terrain for the 60th Infantry, 26 April 1943.*

kaoui on 21–22 April, and next day had reconnoitered in preparation for attack along the heights north of Djebel el Ang (Hill 668) and Heïdous, all the while in steady contact with the British 78th Division on the British 5 Corps northern flank.

Division von Manteuffel held not only the enemy line in front of the 9th Infantry Division but part of that in the southern portion of the II Corps zone of advance. The area nearest Sidi Nsir thus was defended by the three battalions of *Luftwaffe Regiment Barenthin* and the remainder by the northern wing of the *334th Infantry Division*. The area near Sidi Nsir and the sector extending north for about ten miles was defended by two battalions of *Luftwaffe Regiment Barenthin* with a third battalion in reserve. Southward from this area, across the Tine river valley, to the heights of Djebel Lanserine, was the main body of the *334th Infantry Division*. The eight infantry battalions holding the front were organized in three regiments. North of the Medjerda river were the *755th Infantry*, a provisional headquarters, and the *756th Mountain Regiment*. Two more battalions and elements of the *504th Heavy Panzer Battalion* were in tactical reserve. The *334th Division* sector to the south, across the Medjerda river to the Medjez el Bab–Tunis highway (inclusive), was held by the *754th Infantry Regiment*. There British 5 Corps was attacking at the same

time that the U.S. II Corps was engaged on its northern flank.[24]

The terrain over which the 1st Infantry Division and other southern elements of II Corps were to advance was covered with less dense underbrush than that to the north. Its valleys held cultivated fields of short, swiftly maturing wheat and numerous olive groves extending up the lower slopes. The hills were rocky, covered at best with thin grass, but the contours were generally more rounded than those at El Guettar, for example. Most of the hills occurred in groups so related that several had to be attacked simultaneously. Their proximity to each other enabled the enemy to furnish supporting fire from hill to hill. Furthermore, the enemy's sweeping observation from certain loftier crests made it possible for him to direct artillery and mortar fire by batteries well to the rear, and even out of range of American artillery, and to prevent surprise in daylight operations. Of the higher hills, Djebel Tahent (Hill 609), three miles east of Sidi Nsir, was an outstanding example of a major objective surrounded by lesser hills in an interlocking system of defense. There were other clusters, with the one containing Hill 575, near the road from Bédja to Sidi Nsir, requiring protracted and costly efforts by the attacking force.

The three combat teams (26th, 16th, and 18th) of the 1st Infantry Division attacked early on 23 April after very heavy artillery preparation against the principal crests and forward slopes of the first objective. The summits were identified as Hill 575 (Kef el Goraa) at the northwest, Hill 400 in the center, and Hills 407 (Djebel el Beïda) and 350 (Djebel Rmel) at the southeast. Each was the nucleus of a group of hills in a rugged area from two to seven miles southeast of Sidi Nsir, and north or northeast of a semicircular arc of lower ground. The path of advance beyond these first groups between the Tine valley and the Sidi Nsir–Chouïgui road became an area of strongly defined, somewhat converging ridges and valleys, with Djebel Touta (444)–Djebel el Berakine (391)–Djebel el Anz (289) on the north and Djebel Sidi Meftah (341) and Djebel Badjar (278) on the south. The topography of this subarea differed from that of the tangled hill masses farther north across the road, near Hill 609. Once the attack had pushed beyond the first line, the elements of the division on the right would be drawn along the ridges toward a narrowing front, while the remainder of the division was being committed to terrain much more like that in which the attack began.

Hill 575 was the bulbous western extremity of a saw-tooth ridge which extended for 7,000 yards almost due east, where a low saddle separated it from Djebel Sidi Meftah. Hill 400, not quite 3,000 yards to the southeast of Hill 575, was surrounded by rounded knobs and bold heights. Hill 407, 3,100 yards farther southeast and Hill 350, almost as far again in the same direction, could each be approached from the west over gently rolling ground but each was flanked by other hills in close proximity on north, east, and south. The plan of attack sent the 26th Infantry against Hill 575, the 16th against 400, and the 18th to gain Hills 407 and 350. In each instance, adjacent crests had to be occupied before

[24] (1) Maps, *Lagekarte 334th Inf Div* (1: 50,000) and *Fifth Panzer Army* (1: 200,000) in *Fifth Panzer Army, KTB, Anlagen,* folder containing four maps and miscellaneous documents, 29 Apr 43. (2) *Army Group Africa, Sitreps,* 20–24 Apr 43. (3) 1st Div G–3 Jnl, 24 Apr 43. (4) II Corps AAR, 15 May 43, Map 2.

the major objective could be taken and held.[25] The central thrust by Combat Team 16 against Hill 400 first crossed some gentle slopes to the bases of two hills located 600 and 1,000 yards to the southwest of the objective. Each of these eminences was firmly defended, particularly with automatic and mortar fire, and with the greatest stubbornness. The attack promised to succeed by the next day but by nightfall had not gained firm possession of Hill 400.[26]

On the south wing the 2d Battalion, 18th Infantry (Lt. Col. Ben Sternberg), attacked Hill 350 while the 3d Battalion was sent against Hill 407. A specific objective on Hill 350 was the "Windmill Farm" on its southern slopes. The 2d Battalion gained, lost, and regained the crest before daylight, and then lost it to a strong infantry counterattack from the northeast, made with direct artillery support which hurt the American units severely. To take the hill in daylight from a fully alerted defending force, a dense artillery preparation was delivered prior to 1145 hours, and then Company F, 18th Infantry, supported by one company of light tanks of the 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, drove the Germans off the hill by an assault from the northeast despite intense machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire. Some 60 prisoners were taken, identified as from the *3d Tunis Battalion*. The 2d Battalion, 18th Infantry, lost 43 killed, 161 wounded, and 20 missing during the day.[27]

The division's southern flank in the high ground above the Tine river valley was securely established.

The 3d Battalion, 18th Infantry (Lt. Col. C. P. Brown), went against a stronger opponent in trying to take Hill 407. Its numerous shoulders, separated by bare draws, enabled the defenders to cover the approaches with machine gun and mortar fire. The enemy also received reinforcements from the north and east during the day. The attack followed a twenty-minute artillery preparation and at about 0430 hours brought the head of the American column to the southwestern base of Hill 407, where the troops began receiving considerable machine gun fire. One platoon of Company L reached the upper slopes only to be cut off and captured, while the remainder of the battalion was driven into a deep draw and pinned down there for the rest of the day. The 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, was then released from division reserve to pass through the 3d Battalion during the early morning and to resume the attack. By the time this relief was completed, the 3d Battalion's casualties were 17 killed, 73 wounded, and 48 missing in action.[28]

The northern wing of the 1st Infantry Division's attack was undertaken by the 26th Infantry. Colonel Bowen planned to employ the 3d Battalion in a limited holding attack toward two hills between Hill 575 and the Bédja–Sidi Nsir road, while the 1st and 2d Battalions seized Hill 575, Hill 549, just east of it, and other heights northeast of them, in order to protect the north flank of Combat Team 16. After the artillery preparation, the attacking troops would follow a rolling barrage. The attack on Hill 575

[25] 1st Div G–3 Opns Rpt, Tunis Opn, 15 Apr–7 May 43, including Overlay 2 and Map.

[26] 1st Div G–3 Opns Rpt, Tunis Opn, 15 Apr–7 May 43.

[27] (1) 2d Bn 18th Inf Hist, 19 Apr–8 May 43, in 18th Inf AAR. (2) The 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, lost thirteen light and five medium tanks on 23 April 1943. Msg, 1st Armd Div Periodic Rpt 80, 23 Apr 43, Entry 24, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[28] 3d Bn 18th Inf Jnl, 23 Apr 43, in 18th Inf AAR, 12 Apr–8 May 43.

would require an approach from the west by the 1st Battalion and from the southwest by the 2d Battalion. Finally, six medium tanks of the 13th Armored Regiment were to go along the road to Sidi Nsir as a diversion, while the 26th's Antitank Company and two platoons from the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion protected a roadblock behind them.

The attack before dawn soon revealed that the enemy was strongly established on Hill 575. The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, occupied a hill a thousand yards west of Hill 575 without serious opposition, but then came under fire too strong for the battalion to continue eastward onto Hill 575. Likewise, the 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry, could secure no foothold on Hill 575 from the southwest, and General Roosevelt estimated that to take it would be "a tough fight." [29] More artillery fire was called for, and the American forces withdrew until the hill could thus be softened up and reinforcements could arrive. Under this fire, the enemy was also reinforced, and he dug additional positions among concrete emplacements which he had already constructed on the western slopes. The 3d Battalion, 26th Infantry, was directed to plan for participation in the attack after it had been relieved next day by the 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry.[30]

South of the Tine river, the first day's attack also met with a limited success. There the dismonted 6th Armored Infantry (less the 2d Battalion) under command of Col. Robert I. Stack sent its 3d Battalion against three adjacent hills northwest of Heïdous. The three objectives were Hill 420, the western height of a curving ridge (Djebel Bateune Slama) in the center, Hill 388 to the north, and Hill 485 to the southeast. The crests were approximately one mile apart but the rugged slopes dropped to narrow defiles and were under observation or fire from each other. Stack's men took Hill 388 at the edge of the valley but could not retain it against the enemy's counterattack. Hill 420's western slopes were seized and held, but the attack on the northeastern slopes of Hill 485 was successfully stopped by flanking fire from the high ground farther east on Djebel Bateune Slama. The natural advantages for defense in this extraordinarily rough terrain required a considerably stronger effort if the infantry was to succeed in pushing ahead.[31]

The first day's operations of the reinforced 1st Infantry Division established the relative strength of the enemy's defenses at certain points along the broad front. The 26th Infantry at Hill 575, the 18th Infantry at Hill 407, and the 6th Armored Infantry at Hill 420 ran into resistance not only from well-placed enemy positions on the main objective but also from adjacent heights. They had already sampled the enemy's effective placing of mine fields, and had taken note of his ability to organize counterattacking forces rapidly in order to regain lost ridges. The fact that it would be necessary for the Americans to follow their artillery preparation closely in order to occupy any ground for effective defense against counterattack was confirmed. Which hills to seize as the key crests in the various interlocking groups

[29] Msg, 0625, 23 Apr 43, Entry 24, in 1st Div G–3 Jnl.

[30] (1) Msg, 2240, 23 Apr 43, Entry 77, in 1st Div G–3 Jnl. (2) The 168th Infantry, with Company C of the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion attached, relieved the 26th Infantry on the night of 24–25 April. 168th Inf FO 14, 24 Apr 43. (3) 1st Div G–3 Opns Rpt, 24 Apr 43. (4) Msg, 24 Apr 43, Entry 44, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[31] 6th Armd Inf AAR, 2 Sep 43.

had also been ascertained during the first day's attack.

On 24 April, the 16th Infantry's experience was an outstanding example of the widening consequences of a success at a particular hill. The 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, fought its way to the top of Hill 469 (Djebel Berboukr) in a battle which took much of the day. As the battalion cleared the enemy from that height in the late afternoon, the 3d Battalion, 16th Infantry, which had been pinned down by flanking fire from Hill 469, was at last able to push northeastward up Hill 394 (Djebel Bou Achour), about a mile east of Hill 469. At the same time, the 2d Battalion, 26th Infantry, extended its line eastward along the ridge south of Hill 575 toward Hill 469, and held its positions there. Thus the 1st Infantry Division's line was pushed forward, southeast of Hill 575, until it faced almost north on a front nearly four miles long.

The 3d Battalion, 18th Infantry, had been stopped at the base of Hill 407 for much of 23 April, but the 1st Battalion, which passed through the 3d during the night, readily captured the crest after a thirty-minute artillery preparation. Two infantry companies and the heavy weapons company dug in to hold it against counterattack, while patrols and elements of the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion worked through the valleys to the east. They confirmed the presence on Hill 346, the next ridge 1,500 yards to the northeast, of an undetermined number of the enemy, supported by an 88-mm. dual-purpose battery, two tanks, and a self-propelled gun.[32]

South of the Tine valley the 6th Armored Infantry, on 24–25 April, renewed its attack against the same three hills it had assaulted the day before. A reinforced company of the 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, tried unsuccessfully to gain Hill 388 on the north, while elements of the 3d Battalion swung around the southern side of Hill 485 in order to strike it from the southeast, in defilade from Djebel Bateune Slama (Hill 420). Before completing these measures, the Americans won all three hills by default as the enemy pulled back under a certain amount of pressure during a general Axis withdrawal undertaken on 25 April. The next line at which he appeared ready to resume his stand was about four miles to the northeast, on a group of hills located at a point where the Tine valley pivots to the north.[33]

The II Corps modified the scheme of attack between Sidi Nsir and the Tine valley after the second day's operations in view of certain factors—the enemy's firmer grip on the hills near Sidi Nsir, the successes thus far attained near the northern edge of the Tine, the prospective arrival of the whole 34th Infantry Division, and the availability of Headquarters, 1st Armored Division, to assume responsibility for operations in the Tine valley and on the extreme south flank. General Allen's front was narrowed to take account also of the salient over which his attack had already advanced. The 26th and 18th Infantry were expected to converge as the former drove along the ridges of Djebel Touta–Djebel el Berakine–Djebel el Anz to the eastern edge of the mountain area, and the latter advanced along the steep-sided Djebel Sidi Meftah to Djebel Badjar. The

[32] (1) 1st Bn 18th Inf Hist, 21 Apr–8 May 43, in 18th Inf AAR. (2) 701st TD Bn AAR, 19 Apr–9 May 43.

[33] (1) 1st Bn 6th Armd Inf Diary, 1942–43. (2) 6th Armd Inf Hist, 21–11 May 43, 14 May 43. (3) 6th Armd Inf AAR, 2 Sep 43. (4) 1st Armd Div AAR, 2 May 43.

16th Infantry would be pinched out and held in divisional reserve.[34] The 6th Armored Infantry was expected to gain control of the heights east of Djebel Badjar where the Tine river runs through a narrow defile before crossing the Sidi Nsir–Chouïgui Road.[35]

By the time the attack jumped off early on 25 April, the enemy had pulled quietly back. Only security detachments remained to protect the enemy's retirement, but his artillery was zeroed in to strike the hills under American attack once they were occupied, and succeeded at 0400 in driving the American troops off two of them (Hills 469 and 394) for a time.[36] The enemy left booby-trapped mine fields as he withdrew to a new line. He appeared to be in greater strength than before on Hill 473, a mile and a half west of Sidi Nsir, but by 2000 the 1st Infantry Division had occupied the western end of Djebel Sidi Meftah, and the hills leading to it from the southwest; Djebel Touta, close to the Sidi Nsir–Chouïgui road, and hills directly west of Djebel Touta; and in the Tine valley, was at a line which stretched southeastward to advanced elements of the 6th Armored Infantry at Point 350, about a mile and a half north of Djebel el Ang (668).[37] General Allen intended to continue on 26 April toward the intermediate objectives sketched in the current plan of attack, but the 1st Infantry Division's salient was projecting well into enemy-held territory with a northern flank extending for 10,000 yards along the road to Chouïgui. For operations on 26 April, the fourth day of the offensive, the 1st Infantry Division would no longer have the support of the 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, which returned to the control of the 1st Armored Division during the preceding night, but instead was to be supported on the northwestern flank by the 168th Infantry. That unit had not only occupied Hills 344 and 533, northwest of Hill 575, but now took over from the 26th Infantry the mopping up on Hill 575.

Through a heavy early morning fog on 26 April, General Allen's troops toiled and groped along the ridges of Djebel Sidi Meftah and Djebel Touta almost as far as their eastern extremities. Patrols in the forenoon crossed to the area north of the Sidi Nsir–Chouïgui road, southeast of Hill 609. Observers on newly gained heights spotted enemy troop movements and directed artillery fire on many points, including the top of Hill 609. General Allen formulated a tentative modification of the division's objectives before the day was over. The new divisional front under this revision would be narrowed to less than five miles, to be held by one battalion each from the 26th and 18th Infantry Regiments, at a line running eastward from Hill 531 (about a thousand yards south of Hill 609) over the western end of Djebel el Anz and then southeastward via the eastern slopes of Djebel Sidi Meftah to the Tine river valley. Other units were then to reconnoiter in preparation for eventual resumption of the advance, and the 16th Infantry was alerted for possible commitment on the left of the 26th Infantry along the northern edge of the divisional

[34] Msg, 24 Apr 43, Entry 44, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[35] 1st Div G–3 Opns Rpt and Jnl, Overlay 3, 25 Apr 43.

[36] Msg, 25 Apr 43, Entry 13, in 1st Div G–3 Jnl.

[37] (1) Msgs, 25 Apr 43, Entries 79, 80, and 84, in 1st Div G–3 Jnl. (2) The 1st Engineer Battalion lifted 1,400 mines in the 26th Infantry zone on 25 April. See Col Michael Buckley, Jr., Obsr's Rpt, 26 Jun 43, sub: II Corps Artillery 21–26 Apr 43. AGF 319.1/3 (For. Obs).

zone in co-ordination with the 34th Infantry Division's operations to seize Hill 609.[38]

The operations of U.S. II Corps by 26 April had shown how hard a fight must be expected before it could open the way to Mateur either at the north through the envelopment of the Djefna position or at the south by driving the enemy from the hills on either side of the Tine river valley. In the center, the front had been pushed along the Sidi Nsir–Chouïgui road far enough to deny its use to the enemy but not far enough for use by American traffic. The enemy had hung on persistently to Hill 575 and to those hills near Sidi Nsir which he had defended successfully for the last two days against the 168th Infantry. On 26 April, General Ryder's 34th Infantry Division assumed responsibility for a zone between the 9th and 1st Infantry Divisions, from Djebel Grembil (499) and Djebel el Hara (473) on the northwest to Hill 575 on the southeast. At the same time elements of Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, were searching out areas in which they could provide greater support, but the policy of II Corps was to keep the division concentrated for a swifter thrust, later, out of The Mousetrap and into the more open countryside near Mateur. General Bradley did not intend to squander his mobile strength in winning a path through the enemy's antitank defenses. The entire Allied offensive after two days had coerced the enemy into shortening his line by a general withdrawal to a second set of positions, but by 26 April the progress of the attack was slowed from one end of that line to the other.[39]

[38] (1) Msgs, 26 Apr 43, Entries 13, 14, 19, 22, 29, 47, 49, and 50, and Overlay, Entries 52 and 53, in 1st Div G–3 Jnl. (2) 1st Div G–3 Opns Rpt, 27 Apr 43.

[39] For the decision to pull back, see Daily Rpt, *Army Group Africa to OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt,* 24 Apr 43, in *Army Group Africa, Sitreps.*

CHAPTER XXXIII

The Advance To Mateur

The 34th Division's attack was expected to continue on a northeast-southwest axis against the westward bulge in the enemy's line along the hills north of the Sidi Nsir–Chouïgui road, and thus to bring under Allied control the heights of Hill 609.[1] (*Map XII*)

Hill 609

Hill 609's upper contours rising from a much larger, less steeply slanting base, when seen from above, resemble a crude Indian arrowhead pointing toward the east. From tip to base, this arrowhead extends for more than 800 yards, while the distance from the northern to the southern barb approximates 500 yards. Deep notches, bounded by precipitous slopes, pierce the northern and southern sides. Its top is divided into two major areas, a fairly level table rising gradually from west to east in the triangular section between tip and barbs, and an irregular amphitheater falling off to the west, with a narrow level shelf above the white southwestern escarpment. That cliff because of its great height masks from the adjacent ground to the south and southwest the existence of the higher slopes on the western portion of the crest and gives the appearance of a substantial mesa resting on a massive ridge. Low vegetation, mostly bunch grass, growing among rocky outcrops over much of Hill 609, offered little concealment, while the rocky ground made digging in with infantry tools out of the question.[2]

The triangular eastern section juts up from its base, while the western end rises gradually on the northwest and most steeply of the entire mass on the southwest. There a great palisade, looming brightly in the April sun high above the surrounding ground, was visible to the attacking forces for many miles. An unimproved road crosses the western part of the arrowhead to an Arab village which nestles at the base of the southern notch. Another track skirts the crest at the east, giving access to scattered olive orchards on the lower slopes. Hill 609 is no monadnock but its summit projects at least 200 feet above the crests of any neighboring hills, and it furnished excellent observation over much of the II Corps zone of attack. A British artillery observation post there in February had proved its value.

Hill 609 could be captured and retained only by driving the enemy from adjacent hills which controlled the approaches. A

[1] (1) 168th Inf Hist, 1943. (2) 168th Inf FO 15, 26 Apr 43. (3) Maj Ross P. Thrasher, Operations of the 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry, at Hill 473 (Djebel el Hara), 26–28 Apr 43, MS. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga., 1949–50.

[2] Foxholes were blasted out with "bee-hive" explosive charges by American troops at many of the hills in this zone.



HILL 609, *looking north.*

mountainous mass directly west of the main objective has two great shoulders, Hill 490 and Hill 435 (northwest of Hill 490). A second massif northwest of Hill 609, divided by a narrow defile from Hill 490, is known as Hill 461. Opposite the southeastern quarter of Hill 609 and northwest of the Sidi Nsir–Chouïgui road is a wide hilly zone with two rows of crests or ridges. An observer on Hill 609 sweeping the horizon from south to east sees the crests designated on the map as Hills 529, 531, 455, 523, 545 and then 558. Almost parallel to these hills and between them and the Sidi Nsir–Chouïgui road is a lower series of heights rising from a second ridge, of which the most prominent hills are 428 and 476. The contours of these hills are usually rounded except at the northwest, where they are more sharply eroded, so that from Hill 609 this area looks somewhat like a rolling tableland extending back from a steep edge. From the southwest, even from observation points on the shoulders of hills within the American lines, observers could see the upper slopes only on some of these hills, leaving important details of the terrain near their bases to be ascertained by reconnaissance patrols.[3]

The boundary between the 34th Infantry Division and the 1st Infantry Division cut across this area from the southwest to the northeast in such a way as to require mutual

[3] (1) Geog Sec Gen Staff Map 4225 (Tunisia), 1: 50,000, Sheets 11, 12. (2) Aerial and ground photos by Lt Col John C. Hatlem (USAF). OCMH.



HILL COMPLEX IN SIDI NSIR AREA, *looking northeast.*

support between the units on either flank. The boundary sliced across the southeastern slopes of Hill 531, with the smaller part of that mile-long ridge inside General Allen's area, and the rest reaching its highest point at 531 in the attack zone of the 34th Infantry Division. The 16th Infantry could best approach the southeastern portion of Hill 531 by passing through the saddle of Kef el Guebli (529). The regiment could not continue to other assigned objectives to the east and northeast without being subjected to flanking fire from Hill 531. The 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry, could attack Hill 531 only over ground already being occupied by elements of the 16th Infantry. A battalion commander of the 135th Infantry on occasion directed American artillery fire on an enemy target in the 16th Infantry's area. Lt. Col. Robert P. Miller, commander of the 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry, was mindful of the disastrous consequences which a failure of co-ordination could cause because of his own recent experience on the left flank at Fondouk el Aouareb near Djebel Aïn el Rhorab, and he took the initiative in arranging a telephone connection with the command post of the adjacent unit of the 16th Infantry. Regimental liaison was also established. The difficulties of co-ordinated operations in such a complex area severely strained the possible arrangements.[4]

[4] (1) Report of Activity of 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry, Vicinity of Hill 531, dated 10 May 43, in 3d Bn 16th Inf AAR. (2) Ltr, Col Robert P. Miller to author, 14 Jan 51, with incls. (3) Ltr, Brig Gen George A. Taylor (Ret.) to author, 22 Nov and 20 Dec 50. (4) Ltr, Col Landon to author, 27 Jan 51.



HILL 609 AREA, *looking south, southwest.*

The Attack Opens

Hill 609 was wholly in the 34th Infantry Division's zone. The strength and the determination with which the enemy would defend his possession of that dominating height, and the nature of the interlocking defense of its satellite hills, were discovered during the first stage of the operations to seize it. General Ryder's initial plan of attack assigned the task of taking the hill to the 135th Infantry (Colonel Ward), which gained control on 26 April of lightly held heights, but discovered almost at once that a direct approach to Hill 609 from the southwest would be strongly resisted from Hill 490 (to the west), Hill 531 (to the south), and from Hill 609 itself. The Americans did not then know that the relatively small forces on these hills would be able to hold them back. General Ryder, after being advised that Hill 609 itself might be "bypassed," approved Colonel Ward's plan to send one battalion against Hill 490 and a second battalion to occupy the part of Hill 529 in the division zone and then continue to Hill 531.[5]

Neither of these two attacks on the night of 26–27 April was successful. The two battalions gained footholds, but failed to reach their objectives. Hill 490 was won on 28 April only after an additional battalion had been committed and a series of enemy counterattacks had been repulsed. Control over the upper slopes of this large hill mass west of Hill 609 was extended northwest-

[5] (1) Interv with Col Ward, 30 Nov 50. (2) Ltr, Col Miller to author, 14 Jan 51, with incls. (3) Interv with Gen Caffey, 21 Feb 50. (4) 34th Div FO 35, 26 Apr 43, and FO 36, 27 Apr 43.

ward onto the Hill 435 shoulder. The 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry, discovered at the same time at Hills 529 and 531 what the 16th Infantry had already ascertained—that American troops could send patrols or small attacking forces without being resisted, but any substantial movement was likely to be observed from one of the heights in enemy possession and to receive prepared artillery fires. Although an attacking force might work its way up a southwestern slope and reach the bare top, once there, it would be pinned down by heavy machine gun fire from a neighboring hill and subjected to severe casualties by enemy artillery air bursts. The enemy used a reverse slope defense, firing his automatic weapons in quick bursts, then ducking for cover, and dropping high trajectory fire into draws and gulches through which attacking troops could be expected to move. Many such areas were mined. Whenever American troops gained a summit and survived the subsequent enemy fire, they could expect counterattacks before they had organized a defense unless they were extraordinarily quick about it. At Hill 529, the enemy had been temporarily driven off the top before noon, 27 April, but Hill 531, the next objective, seemed unattainable a day later, because of the fire which he could place on the hill from various quarters.[6] Furthermore, the enemy was able to deliver flanking fire from Hill 531 both eastward upon the 16th Infantry during its operations toward Hill 523 and northwestward over the open area between Hill 490 and Hill 609. Hill 531 seemed on the map much like any other hill, but for a time, the course of the battle implied that it was the key to the 1st Division's seizure of Hills 523 and 545, northeast of it, and to any success against Hill 609, still the main objective of the 34th Division, from the south. On 27 April, General Anderson proposed to General Bradley that Hill 609 be bypassed, but was persuaded that such a move would not be good tactics.[7]

First Failure and Broadened Plans

The inability of General Ryder's division to seize Hill 609 on 28 April in turn frustrated the 1st Infantry Division's costly attempts on that day to press northeastward as far as Hills 523 and 545, which masked the enemy's line of supply and principal route of reinforcement. General Allen then at 1400 ordered all units under his command to hold up offensive movement pending the capture of Hill 609 by the 34th Division.[8] General Ryder next planned to take Hill 609 early on 29 April by envelopment from the north, west, and south. Three interrelated attacks would be made by the three battalions of the 135th Infantry. The 3d Battalion had captured Hill 490 the day before. It was now to advance from this hill behind a rolling barrage to make a holding attack against the southwestern section of Hill 609 while the 2d Battalion gained Hill 461 and swung southeast, and while the 1st Battalion took Hill 531 and attacked northward. Defense of Hill 490 (and Hill 435) was assigned to

[6] (1) Msg, Capt Fanning (CO Co C 135th Inf) to Bn Comdr, 1125, 28 Apr 43, Incl 4 to Ltr, Col Miller to author, 14 Jan 51. (2) Ltr, Col Landon to author, 27 Jan 51. (3) Msgs, 0700, 28 Apr 43, Entries 11–13, and 0930, 28 Apr 43, Entry 23, in 1st Div G–3 Jnl.

[7] (1) See II Corps plans as arranged between General Bradley and Generals Allen and Ryder, and recorded next morning in Entry 231, 28 Apr 43, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, pp. 85–87.

[8] Msgs, 28 Apr 43, Entries 13, 14, and 83, in 1st Div G–3 Jnl.



TROOPS MOVING TO A NEW POSITION NEAR HILL 609, *28 April 1943.*

the 3d Battalion, 133d Infantry, attached to the 135th Infantry. These moves were made in the hope that if all three battalions in the assault were to strike Hill 609 simultaneously, the defenders might be taken off balance by at least one of them.[9]

The plan could not be executed on 29 April. The enemy held positions in the draw between Hill 435 and Hill 461 from which enfilading fire struck the western flank of the 2d Battalion, 135th Infantry, already much weakened by the bitter fighting of the previous day, and pinned it down short of Hill 461. The northern envelopment was thus checked before it was fairly in progress. On the other flank, the 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry, could not get a firm hold at any point on Hill 531, and withdrew at nightfall, as it had on the two preceding days, toward Hill 529 (Kef el Guebli). Maj. Garnet Hall's 3d Battalion, 135th Infantry, made its attack from the base of Hill 490 toward the southwestern quarter of Hill 609 and got across the intervening ground behind a rolling barrage as far as the base of the objective. When the barrage was lifted, however, the enemy counterattacked and forced the Americans back a quarter of a mile. There they reorganized amid rocky outcrops along a low rise and started a second attack with renewed artillery support. This advance brought the troops part way up the hills to the shelf, where many sought cover from alert enemy riflemen and machine gunners among the buildings of the Arab village, and thus passed out of control of the battalion commander. At that stage, darkness fell. The enemy was still in full possession of Hill 609.[10]

The attack by II Corps in the south had reached a critical point after the failure on 29 April. Casualties included 183 killed, 1,594 wounded, and 676 captured or missing.[11] General Allen's battered units were obliged to operate at an enormous disadvantage. The 16th Infantry had been severely punished trying to reach Hill 523. The 26th Infantry, fighting to occupy Djebel el Anz (289), drew flanking fire from Hills 523 and 545 northwest of it. To

[9] 135th Inf Hist, Sec. IV, Pts. e, f.

[10] (1) Interv with Col Ward, 30 Nov 50. (2) 135th Inf Hist, 18 Oct 42–15 May 43, pp. 12–13. (3) Maj Arnold N. Brandt, Operations of the 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry, at Hills 609 and 531, 26 Apr–2 May 43, MS. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga., 1947–48.

[11] Half of the wounded (781) had been evacuated. Strength remained 95,194. II Corps Weekly Rpt, 30 Apr 43, copy in II Corps G–4 Jnl.

attack and hold Hills 523 and 545 before the enemy had been driven off Hill 609 was certain to be costly and likely to prove impossible. Those heights, although not so close to Hill 609, were as exposed to fire as Hill 531. Yet General Allen was not disposed to accept a plan in which his own command had to wait for another to discharge its part of the burden of attack.[12] He reasoned that if in addition to Hills 523 and 545, he took another height, Hill 558 (Djebel el Facuar), about 4,000 yards east-northeast of Hill 609, he might thereby enclose Hill 609 in a pocket from which the enemy would feel compelled to withdraw before it became too late. Although the enemy had lost only 408 prisoners, he was weakening, for his troops had been under incessant pressure by substantially greater forces. Furthermore, his reinforcements and supplies were brought in under American observation and fire and his rations and ammunition were running critically low.[13] There were other signs that the enemy was resorting to improvisation and persisting under severe strain. In the whole operation from Hill 609 to the Tine river valley, therefore, it was perhaps better to keep pushing everywhere rather than to concentrate on some key objective as a method of winning the battle. It was possible, moreover, that if the enemy failed in his efforts to defend the Hill 609 complex the effort would leave him so depleted that he would be unable to hold firmly the area farther to the northeast. An attempt to capture an obstacle to American advance was thus at the same time a major opportunity for the destruction of the enemy's fighting power.

During the afternoon of 29 April, General Ryder planned an attack with tanks for execution that night and early next day. With one company of medium tanks and a fresh battalion of infantry (the 1st Battalion, 133d Infantry) attached to Colonel Ward's command, that force, jumping off from a point 800 yards east-southeast of Hill 490, was to make a predawn assault with the objective of gaining a foothold on the northwestern slopes of Hill 609 for subsequent infantry exploitation. The tank unit, Company I, 1st Armored Regiment (Capt. Robert D. Gwin), made its own reconnaissance before darkness and devised its own tactical plan, which was co-ordinated with others and approved by General Ryder at one of his daily command conferences within sight of the area to be attacked.[14]

At the same time, General Allen ordered an attack during the night by the 16th Infantry to seize Hill 523. Hill 523 could not be held unless the enemy was also driven from Hill 545, the next crest to the east on the same major ridge. Colonel Taylor therefore worked out a plan for the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry (Lt. Col. Charles J. Denholm), to cross the open area south of Hill 523 in darkness and seize its crest before daylight, while the 3d Battalion would clear the southern sector of Hill 531 by pushing north toward the reverse slope where the enemy had dug his positions. The 2d Bat-

[12] Memo, Maj Gen Terry Allen (Ret.) for Chief of Mil Hist, 4 Jan 51. OCMH.

[13] (1) Msgs, 29 Apr 43, Entries 30, 31, 36, and 41 in 1st Div G–3 Jnl. (2) Ltr, Maj John A. Lauten (then S–2, 16th Inf) to Gen Taylor, 28 Dec 50. Copy in OCMH. (3) *Army Group Africa, Sitreps,* 28–29 Apr 43.

[14] (1) 34th Div FO 37, 2000, 29 Apr 43. (2) Memo, Capt Gwin for CO 3d Bn 1st Armd Regt, 14 May 43, sub: Opns of Co I while attached to 34th Div near Sidi Nsir 30 Apr–4 May 43, in 3d Bn 1st Armd Regt AAR.

talion, 16th Infantry, was to hold itself in readiness to attack Hill 545 at the earliest opportunity.[15] These two major attacks on 29–30 April would be conducted while the 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry, returned to the offensive for the third day in the attempt to clear the northwestern slopes of Hill 531, and while at Djebel el Anz the 26th Infantry improved its positions on the western approach in the face of the enemy's apparent intention to challenge that hold by strong counterattack.

Successful General Attack, 30 April–1 May

On 30 April American troops reached the summit of Hills 609, 531, and 523 and began to defend these gains against determined enemy countermeasures. As expected, some of these hills proved more costly than others. The early morning attack to reach the northwestern slopes of Hill 609 by Lt. Col. Carley L. Marshall's 1st Battalion, 133d Infantry, and Captain Gwin's Company I, 1st Armored Regiment, was a success. Not only did these units push through, but on their left, the 2d Battalion, 135th Infantry, was able to renew its advance onto Hill 461, and captured it. From there the battalion fanned out to the southeast and by 1100 made contact with Colonel Marshall's battalion. Elements of the latter, which had "grabbed and held onto the tails" of the tanks, cleaned out enemy gun positions. The German defenders knocked out four of the tanks (two of which were recoverable), but the remainder were ready to roll back over the saddle between Hill 490 and Hill 609 in order to mop up.

Colonel Miller's battalion by then was heavily engaged in what proved to be the final attack on Hill 531. Since the small hours of the day the 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry, had made repeated efforts to reach the summit but had failed. The troops had beaten off a series of German counterattacks by making excellent use of well directed artillery fires. But in their own attempt to seize Hill 531 they were at a distinct disadvantage owing to the failure of the 16th Infantry to maintain its hold on Hill 523. The right flank of Colonel Miller's battalion was thus dangerously exposed. At about 1530 Miller's battalion renewed its attack from the slopes of Hill 529 with the mission of capturing Hill 531 and pushing beyond to Hill 455. Covered by an artillery preparation, including smoke, and by mortar and overhead machine gun fire from Hill 529, Company A, 135th Infantry, worked up the northwestern bulge of Hill 531 while Company C fought its way up the southern slopes. At some points, particularly in the center between these two enveloping companies, the hillside rose in steep escarpments and cliffs, which made these attacks up the two flanks necessary. The enemy pressure on Company A's left flank from Hill 609 was greatly diminished by the simultaneous operations against that hill, and the 3d Battalion, 135th Infantry, near the Arab village, assisted the 1st Battalion at Hill 531 by firing on the enemy's reverse slope positions and checking his repeated attempts at reinforcement. The Germans supplemented other weapons by tying together bundles of "potato masher" grenades and dropping them on the attacking troops from higher crags. When Company C was stopped just short of the top by German rifle and machine gun fire, the heavy weapons platoon, from a rocky shelf,

[15] Opns Overlay for CT 16 Attack, 29 Apr 43, Entry 41, in 1st Div G–3 Jnl.

knocked out some of the enemy's fire power by mortar shells and made possible a renewed advance. Company A left its weapons platoon in position on Kef el Guebli (Hill 529) and used most of one platoon as ammunition carriers. Late in the day, the light machine gun squad and a detail heavily loaded with hand grenades crossed from Hill 529 to Hill 531 and climbed to the crest, where the attack was thereupon renewed. By nightfall, 30 April, Hill 531 was "owned" by Colonel Miller's battalion. But Hill 455 still seemed out of reach and the gap between the battalion and its left neighbor, the 3d Battalion, 135th Infantry, was yet to be closed. The simultaneous operations against Hill 609 had prevented the enemy from subjecting the top of Hill 531 to the sort of fire with which the arrival of the Americans might previously have been greeted.[16]

Hill 523 cost the 1st Infantry Division a heavy price. The hill was taken by the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, in a night attack (29–30 April) against light resistance. The approach due north by compass through open fields of short wheat brought the battalion to the base of its objective undiscovered, and it reached the crest in a swift climb under fire, culminating in an assault with hand grenades and knives. By 0445, it had seized the hill. Colonel Denholm's misgivings, which Colonel Taylor had shared, applied to the difficulty which could be expected not in taking, but in holding, the hill. The line of communications would be under enemy fire. The southern slopes of Hill 523 could be observed and struck from Hill 609 to the west and from lower, intermediate knolls in the area of the German stronghold around Hill 455. On the rocky summit of Hill 523, Denholm's men erected parapets for a perimeter defense. Foxholes were out of the question. An attempt to extend control along the heights to the crest of Hill 545 (northeast of Hill 523) was stopped by an unexpected, deep earthquake fault between two parts of the ridge with a gap too wide to jump and sides too sheer and high to climb. Daylight was certain to bring enemy countermeasures which might cut off the battalion. The expected reaction came at dawn in the form of light fire from the southeast and south, and heavy fire from southwest and west. In shelling from the southwest the Germans employed in particular one captured American self-propelled gun or tank destroyer, and several of their own antitank guns for effective direct fire. All wire lines were broken and all radios were shot out so that by midmorning the battalion lost communication with the rear except by courier. During this preparation fire, the enemy organized a counterattack. He swung around the shoulder of the hill from the southwest and simultaneously attacked from the northeast, encircled the men on the hill, and killed or captured them in a wild melée on the summit. The commander and about 150 men were eventually taken prisoner. The rest were killed.[17]

[16] (1) Brandt, Operations of the 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry . . . 26 Apr–2 May 1943, MS. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga., 1947–48. (2) Ltr, Col Miller to author, 14 Jan 51, with incls. (3) 135th Inf Hist, Sec IV.

[17] (1) Msgs, 0445, 30 Apr, Entry 4, and 1034, 30 Apr 43, Entry 27, in 1st Div G–3 Jnl. (2) Cf. Maj Robert E. Cullis, Operations of the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, in the Attack on Hill 523, Vicinity of Mateur, 30 April–1 May 1943, MS, and Maj David Milotta, same title, MS. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga. Cullis was then the executive officer of the 16th Infantry, and Milotta was a platoon leader in Company A, 16th Infantry. (3) Intervs with Cols Mason and Gibb, 13 Nov 50, and with Col Crawford, 16 Nov. 50.

As soon as he learned that the situation on Hill 523 was critical, General Allen tried to relieve it by sending a company of medium tanks (Company H, 1st Armored Regiment, commanded by Capt. Herbert F. Hillenmeyer), which had been attached to his command. At about the same time, Company I, 1st Armored Regiment, was beginning to work along the southern slopes of Hill 609 from west to east. A combination of enemy mine fields, antitank gun fire, and air attacks and the absence of arrangements for co-ordinated tank-infantry-artillery operations soon frustrated this attempt by Captain Gwin's company and forced Captain Hillenmeyer's company to be redirected to Hill 523 over a longer, slower route. In the interval, other measures to support Colonel Denholm were tried without success. The tanks arrived at approximately 1645. Despite the quick loss of four vehicles to antitank guns, the tank unit then supported a successful small attack to drive the enemy off, but the battalion had been lost. For lack of troops, neither Colonel Taylor nor the enemy could reoccupy the hill in strength.[18]

By midafternoon on 30 April the fall of Hill 609, after four days of fighting, seemed imminent. The troops of the 1st Battalion, 133d Infantry, which had attacked with the tanks, had built up a co-ordinated defense of the sector to the northwest of Hill 609, tying in with the 2d Battalion, 135th Infantry, on Hill 461. The 3d Battalion, which had spent the night in isolation in the area of the Arab village, sent a patrol around the western slopes of Hill 609. At long last these men got to the summit and established an observation post.[19] The Americans had driven the enemy from Hill 609, but their ability to hold it was to be tested by a series of counterattacks during the following night and on 1 May.

During the afternoon of 30 April, the 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry (Lt. Col. Edward W. Bird), was attached to Colonel Ward's command for the last phase of operations against Hill 609. The battalion moved forward to an assembly area north of the Sidi Nsir road about 2,000 yards southwest of Hill 609. Colonel Bird's battalion was directed to advance toward the saddle between Hill 609 and Hill 531, clearing it of the enemy and, by attacking around the eastern and northeastern base of Hill 609, to establish contact with the 1st Battalion, 133d Infantry on its left, while on its right it was to tie in with the 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry on Hill 531. This night assault was ordered for 2300. As the battalion moved toward the saddle and the base of Hill 609 the troops caught by surprise a platoon of enemy infantry trying to infiltrate up the western slopes of Hill 609 behind the lines of the 1st Battalion, 133d Infantry. Before dawn, the Germans sent about a company from Hill 455 to reinforce this advance group. Company F, 168th Infantry, nearest Hill 609, intercepted this attempt to regain the lost position and drove the enemy off with substantial losses. Meanwhile the 1st Battalion, 135th Infantry, had continued its attack in the area of Hill 531 and, after securing the long-contested stronghold, finally closed the gap between it and Hill 609 by also seizing the area of Hill 455 in

[18] (1) Ltr, Gen Taylor to author, 20 Dec 50. (2) Ltr, Col Denholm to author, 13 Dec 50. (3) 1st Div G–3 Jnl, 30 Apr 43, particularly Entries 29, 45, and 59. (4) Intervs with Cols Mason and Gibb, 13 Nov 50.

[19] (1) 135th Inf Hist, Sec. IV, p. 13. (2) 1st Bn 133d Inf AAR in 34th Div Opns Rpt, 11 Dec–15 Jul 43.

the afternoon of 1 May. These operations completed the American ring around Hill 609. German countermeasures on 1 May were ineffective and un-co-ordinated. The enemy undertook a number of desperate efforts to restore his positions, but his movements were now subject to the superb American observation from the very heights which had previously served the German defenders so well. Heavy concentrations from the combined artillery of the 34th and 1st Divisions broke up every enemy attempt to assemble his forces for counterattack.[20] A final German effort at dusk ended in failure. By the end of 1 May, the enemy had failed to make a dent in the newly won positions of the American troops.

Approaching "The Mousetrap"

Elsewhere in the area under attack in the southern part of the II Corps zone, the enemy was forced off critical heights, the most noteworthy of which was Djebel el Anz, just north of the Sidi Nsir–Chouïgui road. The enemy's efforts to retake it reached a climax on 30 April in five unsuccessful counterattacks supported by a last flicker of Stuka attacks and effective fire from 88's. In the possession of the 26th Infantry, Djebel el Anz offered an advantageous position from which to support the 18th Infantry's attack on Djebel Badjar (278), the hill about one mile to the southeast on the opposite side of the road, which guarded the northern side of the narrow Mousetrap exit from the upper Tine valley.[21] (*See Map XI.*)

The operations on the southern side of the Tine valley were geared to the advance of the British 5 Corps farther south, and to the progress of the two infantry divisions fighting between the valley and the area of Hill 609. The tank units of the U.S. 1st Armored Division awaited the signal from General Bradley to emerge from The Mousetrap onto the broader plain near Mateur for the rapid exploitation of success by the infantry in the mountains. When the signal came, Combat Command B would be ready to go. By 1 May, the time seemed very near. Meanwhile, the 6th Armored Infantry, with the 27th, 68th, and 91st Armored Field Artillery Battalions, and reconnaissance troops, fought among a series of shoulders protruding into the Tine valley from Djebel Lanserine (569). Advance was difficult indeed and correspondingly slow, despite determined and often heroic efforts. On 28 April, Company A, 6th Armored Infantry, was held up by enemy machine gunners until Pvt. Nicholas Minue alone boldly crept behind them and cleared them out by bayonet. He persisted against other enemy positions until he was mortally wounded.[22]

A seesaw struggle in these hills had settled into a deadlock by 1 May. Company D, 16th Armored Engineer Battalion, mean-

[20] (1) 168th Inf Hist, 1943, pp. 46–47. (2) 135th Inf Hist, Sec. IV.

[21] (1) 26th Inf AAR, 14 Apr–9 May 43. (2) 26th Inf Jnl, 30 Apr 43. Casualties: four killed, twenty-nine wounded. (3) 1st Div G–3 Jnl, Entries 18 and 20, 30 Apr 43.

[22] For this heroic exploit, he was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Howe, *Battle History of the 1st Armored Division*, pp. 232–33.



MATEUR, *looking northeast.*

while lifted mines from two routes along the banks of the stream and prepared roadbeds toward the narrows for the armored vehicles. The enemy faced the choice of fighting at a growing disadvantage back through the last narrow segment of hills or of pulling back to a shorter line closer to Bizerte and the hills east of the Tine. His decision was affected by the progress of the 9th Infantry Division's attack in the northern part of the II Corps zone.[23]

The Enemy Is Forced To Withdraw, 1–3 May

The 9th Infantry Division's attack was conducted, as already noted, according to a revised plan, beginning on the night of 26–27 April. The 60th Infantry then sent its northern elements along the north side of the Sedjenane river toward Djebel Touro (499), converging on the path of advance of the Corps Franc d'Afrique, while its center and right pushed more nearly eastward toward Kef en Nsour (523). Thus the northern envelopment of the Djefna position devolved upon the 39th Infantry alone rather than upon both regiments. The 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry, after four days of assiduous effort under recurrent strong

[23] (1) 1st Div G–3 Jnl, 1 May 43. (2) 135th Inf Hist, Sec. IV, p. 14. (3) 6th Armd Inf Hist, 14 May 43; 6th Armd Inf AAR, 2 Sep 43. (4) 1st Armd Div AAR, 3 May 43.

enemy artillery fire, gained possession of Hill 382, three miles east of Djebel Aïnchouna, at daylight on 30 April, and started toward its next objective only to be pinned down by accurate shelling, obviously directed by some hidden enemy observer. The locations of the firing batteries were established by American observation and confirmed by enemy prisoners, but they were out of range of the supporting American artillery. The mission of neutralizing these batteries was passed to tactical air support, which was unable to find the one which caused most damage.[24] While the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry, was thus held back, the other two battalions moved from Djebel Aïnchouna by trails northeast of it toward a long Hill 406 (Djebel Nechat el Maza) and a smaller, lower mound, Hill 299, south of its eastern extremity. The 1st Battalion took Hill 406 during the forenoon, organized it, and after 1400 supported the attack of the 3d Battalion on Hill 299. By nightfall, Hill 299 was also occupied. It had been possible from Hill 406 to observe enemy vehicles and a supply dump south of Hill 299, and to bring artillery fire upon the area about an hour after the 3d Battalion's attack on Hill 299 began. Possession of that hill, which had a very steep southeastern slope rising from a small plain, made possible domination of the enemy's supply lines. It was a further menace to the enemy as a base from which the Americans could thrust less than three miles eastward onto the open Mateur plain or southeastward to cut the Sedjenane–Mateur highway in the rear of Djefna position.[25] Plans for a one-battalion attack by the 47th Infantry on Green Hill in conjunction with the 39th Infantry's next spurt were ready when the 9th Infantry Division, on corps orders, suspended offensive movement on 1 May.[26]

The 60th Infantry struggled northeastward across country along the Sedjenane river, through dense underbrush, with the benefit of few trails or roads, but overcoming the drastic supply difficulties. The attacking forces suffered to such a degree from the enemy's use of the observation points on Kef en Nsour (523) that occupation of that height finally seemed imperative. The 3d Battalion approached Kef en Nsour on 30 April, while the remainder of the regiment held strong positions on and near the Djebel Guermach (490), southwest of it.

On 1 May, therefore, the Allies threatened to cut the enemy off from both Bizerte and Mateur. He was obliged to move speedily from the Djefna position. A retirement on Mateur along the Sedjenane road also necessitated a withdrawal from the hills adjacent to the Sidi Nsir road, in the area surmounted by Hill 609, if the forces there were not to be attacked from the flank and rear. The enemy facing the II Corps thus simultaneously found all his positions west and southwest of Mateur untenable. His forces had become insufficient to close the gaps in his line. The supply situation had become acute. The lack of artillery ammunition was such that at some points in the 9th Infantry Division zone, as early as 29 April, about 90 percent of the enemy's shells which fell failed to detonate either because of de-

[24] Reconnaissance at 4,500 feet for ten minutes proved unavailing. Air Support Party Jnl, 27 Apr 43, in Msg, 2 May 43, Entry 31, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[25] (1) 9th Div AAR, 27–30 Apr 43, 10 Sep 43. (2) 60th Inf Hist, 1943, pp. 38–42. (3) Msgs, 30 Apr 43, Entries 71, 78, 119, and 123, in 39th Inf Jnl.

[26] 9th Div AAR, 30 Apr–1 May 43, 10 Sep 43.

fective fuses or other imperfections.[27] On 1 May, only four Siebel ferries and two small craft from Italy reached Tunisian ports, discharging 90 tons of fuel and 60 tons of ammunition. It was a hand-to-mouth situation, with a partly filled hand at that. In the circumstances, the high command chose to pull back the *Fifth Panzer Army*'s line in the sectors of the *Division von Manteuffel* and *334th Infantry Division,* anchoring the northern end in the prepared defenses between the Garaet Ichkeul and the sea, and swinging down the eastern side of the Tine river to Djebel Lanserine.[28]

By 1 May, the Allies estimated that the enemy, far from evacuating the Tunisian bridgehead, would be resolute in defending it, so that they would have to force him back into separate bridgeheads around Bizerte, Tunis, and Cap Bon, or drive him out altogether. Previous expenditure of enemy reserves was believed to have reduced him to shifting units from point to point to meet Allied threats, but not yet to last-ditch perimeter defense of smaller, isolated areas.[29]

The enemy skillfully and quietly withdrew on the nights of 1–2 and 2–3 May. The scope of this retirement was suspected on 2 May and confirmed next day. From Hill 609, a large fire was visible in Mateur.[30] Elsewhere, explosions and fires indicated the demolition of bridges and destruction of matériel. The northern elements of *Division von Manteuffel* pulled back more slowly for lack of vehicles rather than as the result of more determined opposition. The U.S. 9th Infantry Division diverted the 47th Infantry from the Djefna position to the area northwest of Garaet Ichkeul and sent the 39th Infantry to high ground west of it.

The Fall of Mateur, 3 May

Mateur fell on 3 May with dramatic suddeness to the 1st Armored Division, which was finally released after being held for a week on leash. Armored detachments from the division where feasible had assisted from the start in offensive operations with infantry, and had stood in corps reserve ready for a short time to meet an enemy counterattack near Sidi Nsir which was never delivered. They had tipped the scales with the reinforced 135th Infantry in the battle for Hill 609. The 1st Armored Division's zone of attack, in which Combat Command A (Colonel Lambert) had directed operations, had been narrow, and all operations there had been subsidiary. Now the division was to advance out of the upper Tine valley by two cleared routes and, turning northward, to seize Mateur. This operation would not be the classical role of the armored division, exploiting a break-through into the enemy's rear, for the enemy had already pulled back. The maneuver would instead be a rapid pursuit. General Harmon had earlier assigned the mission to Combat Command B under General Robinett.[31]

[27] (1) 9th Div AAR, 10 Sep 43. (2) Msgs, 29 Apr 43, Entries 64 and 69, in 39th Inf Jnl.

[28] (1) Daily Rpt, *Army Group Africa* to *OKH/GenStdH*, 1 May 43, in *Army Group Africa, Sitreps.* (2) MS # D–001 (von Vaerst).

[29] 1st Armd Div G–2 Est, 2400, 30 Apr 43.

[30] Msg, 0610, 3 May 43, Entry 9, 1st Div, G–3 Jnl.

[31] The 1st Armored Division reported 52 light and 154 M4 medium tanks operational at noon, 3 May 1943. See Msg, 3 May 43, Entry 100, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, then consisted of: Headquarters, Combat Command B; 13th Armored Regiment (less 1st

The road from the mouth of the upper Tine valley to Mateur runs almost due northward across a series of broad terraces by which the mountainous area of the recent fighting recedes to the plain adjacent to Mateur. The Tine river sweeps farther to the east around the tips of these contours before flowing northeastward toward Mateur. The base of the western hilly area, extending along a northwest-southeast line, forms one boundary of a triangular area of open undulating plain. Across the northern edge of the plain is the Garaet Ichkeul and a dome-like, sentinel height, Djebel Ichkeul (508). The eastern border is marked by another area of rounded hills which extends from the southeastern corner of the Garaet Ichkeul to Chouïgui pass and Eddekhila. In addition to Chouïgui pass, which had been the scene of the first American armored action against German tanks in World War II, these mountains are crossed by a broader trough which connects the Mateur plain with the Garaet el Mabtouha, ten miles east of it. Through this valley run the main highway and railroad linking Tunis and Mateur. Roads connect Mateur with Bizerte by way of either the western or eastern rim of the Garaet Ichkeul. The latter route passes through a very restricted gap at the southeastern corner of Garaet Ichkeul, and continues northward over the narrow strip of land which separates it from the Lac de Bizerte.

In approaching Mateur from the mouth of the upper Tine valley, Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, crossed the west-

Battalion); 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion; Company C, 16th Armored Engineer Battalion; 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry; 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion—a force which included 18 75-mm. tank destroyers and over 100 medium tanks.

east road from Sidi Nsir to Chouïgui northeast of Djebel Badjar. Along this road advance elements of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division emerged from the hills eastward bound at the same time that the armored force was heading northward. Enemy long-range artillery fire was falling close to the junction, where traffic congestion seemed likely to furnish a juicy target. Alert adjustment enabled the two long columns to cross each other without delay, by sending the vehicles of one through the intervals in the other.[32] The 81st Reconnaissance Battalion arrived at the edge of Mateur at approximately 1100, with the main armored force rolling up in the early afternoon.

The enemy was demolishing the eastern entrance to Mateur as the Americans arrived from the south and west. A few German and Italian prisoners were taken near Mateur but most of the enemy had disappeared in the direction of Ferryville or into the hills south of Lac de Bizerte. Elements of Combat Command B forded the stream east of Mateur to mop up the town while others reconnoitered to the northwest and northeast. General Harmon sent forward the bridge train of the 16th Armored Engineers, and by 2130, that unit had the first of five crossings in operation despite constant artillery shelling, which continued for the next two days, supplemented by air attacks. Combat Command A began its preparations to move up next day. General Harmon's command post was set up about eight miles southwest of Mateur, and from it he issued orders to reconnoiter on 4 May north and east of Mateur. The 9th Infantry Division in the vicinity of Djebel Ichkeul, the 1st Infantry Division along the Tine

[32] Robinett, Among the First, MS, p. 495. In private possession.



1ST ARMORED DIVISION TANK *speeding toward Mateur, 3 May 1943.*

river southeast of Mateur, and the 34th Infantry Division along the road to Chouïgui pass and Eddekhila, also re-established contact with the enemy.

The U.S. 3d Infantry Division (less 7th Regimental Combat Team), commanded by General Truscott, was brought eastward as far as Aïn M'lilla, about thirty miles south of Constantine, to pass from U.S. Fifth Army to British First Army reserve. From 3 May on, its units came under General Anderson's control in the Rhardimaou–Souk el Arba area, not necessarily to be committed in the II Corps area, but to be available where most needed.[33] For the infantry, the prospect was another series of attacks in the hills. The armored division near Mateur had the valley toward Garaet el Mabtouha and the flats adjacent to Garaet Ichkeul and Lac de Bizerte on which to operate, but the adjacent heights in enemy possession undoubtedly held strong antitank positions which would make themselves felt when, after reconnaissance, II Corps resumed its attack.[34]

[33] (1) Memo, Col B. M. Archibald for G–3 AFHQ, 27 Apr 43, sub: Rpt of visit to 18 A Gp. AFHQ Micro Job 10A, Reel 6C. (2) Msg 0814, 18 A Gp to AFHQ, 29 Apr 43; Msg 8040, AFHQ to Fifth Army, 29 Apr 43; Msgs, 18 A Gp to FREEDOM, 3 and 14 May 43; Msg E–1516, EBS to FREEDOM, 8 May 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

[34] (1) II Corps AAR, 15 May 43. (2) Phone Convs, CG 1st Armd Div with G–3 and Asst G–3 II Corps, 0710, 0923, and 1050, 3 May 43, Entries 67, 73, and 78, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (3) Bradley, *A Soldier's Story,* pp. 90–91. (4) 1st Armd Div AAR, 13 Apr–14 May 43.

CHAPTER XXXIV

The End in Tunisia

Plans To Take Tunis

The enemy's withdrawal in the north on the nights of 1–2 and 2–3 May took place while Allied preparations were being made farther south to renew in greater strength the drive on Tunis. Here the first attempt had been stalled well short of its goal. The enemy, apparently aware that the British Eighth Army lacked the power to penetrate the mountainous line which faced it, had been able to shift forces to meet the British 5 Corps by a vigorous counterattack on 28 and 29 April.

North of Enfidaville's olive orchards, the hills bordering the coastal plain had to be brought under control before General Montgomery could renew his attack, which was scheduled for 29 April, over the lower ground. The 2d New Zealand Division and the 201st Guards Brigade protected his western flank. On 29 April, the British 51st Division was given the mission of holding on the western portion of the front while the 4th Indian and 2d New Zealand Divisions, and the untried British 56th Division, opened the way for possible exploitation by armor toward Hammamet. But this attack got off to an unsatisfactory start. General Montgomery, faced with a possible failure, obtained General Alexander's authorization to abandon his attempt to reach Hammamet, and to convert the Eighth Army's role to that of holding the enemy by purely local offensive measures, in conjunction with the northeasterly drive of French XIX Corps.[1]

The 18 Army Group next undertook to split the enemy by overwhelming force rather than further to construct his bridgehead. Although the attacks by II Corps on the north beginning on 27 April and by French XIX Corps on the southwest on 28 April increased in scale, General Alexander decided to make a lightning attack through Massicault at the earliest opportunity. On 30 April, he ordered General Montgomery to send to British First Army as additional reinforcements the best units which could be spared. In response, Montgomery released the most experienced of his divisions, the 7th Armoured and 4th Indian, as well as the 201st Guards Brigade, thus arranging for participation in the final Allied drive by the oldest units of the Eighth Army.[2]

The 18 Army Group issued a formal order for the final attack on 3 May. First Army was expected to attack and take Tunis while the U.S. II Corps co-operated by preventing the enemy from shifting troops to defend it. After taking Tunis, the British First Army was to exploit rapidly to the east and southeast in order, with the aid of the British Eighth Army, to prevent the enemy

[1] Alexander, "The African Campaign," p. 879.

[2] (1) *Ibid.*, p. 881. (2) XIX Corps Opns Order 21, 2 May 43, cited in DMO Jnl, 3 May 43.

from falling back on Cap Bon peninsula. This accomplished, General Anderson was to turn his attack northward against Bizerte in co-operation with the U.S. II Corps.[3] (*Map 21*)

The main thrust by British First Army through Massicault was intended to benefit if possible from surprise. General Anderson tried to create the appearance of a powerful concentration of forces by assembling groups of dummy tanks and other vehicles behind the British 1st Armoured Division in the area northwest of Pont-du-Fahs. The French XIX Corps was encouraged to renew its attacks across the road between Pont-du-Fahs and Saouf, on either 3 or 4 May. Troop columns passing through Djebibina to a point adjacent to the flank of the Eighth Army on 4 May suggested to the enemy that the Allies were planning to strengthen the attack there against the center and southern flank of *German Africa Corps*.[4] While these efforts to draw enemy units to the southern part of the Axis bridgehead were in progress, the British 9 Corps was actually to assemble within the British 5 Corps zone for a powerful lunge northeastward on a 3,000-yard front. After a saturation bombardment by artillery and air, infantry would be expected to open a gap in the manner characteristic of British Eighth Army, and armored elements would grind through the opening at once. By this operation the troops were to reach Tunis with but one night intervening, forging ahead through a narrow corridor. The attack on the flanks was to be made either by 9 Corps after Tunis had fallen, or by 5 Corps while Tunis was being taken.

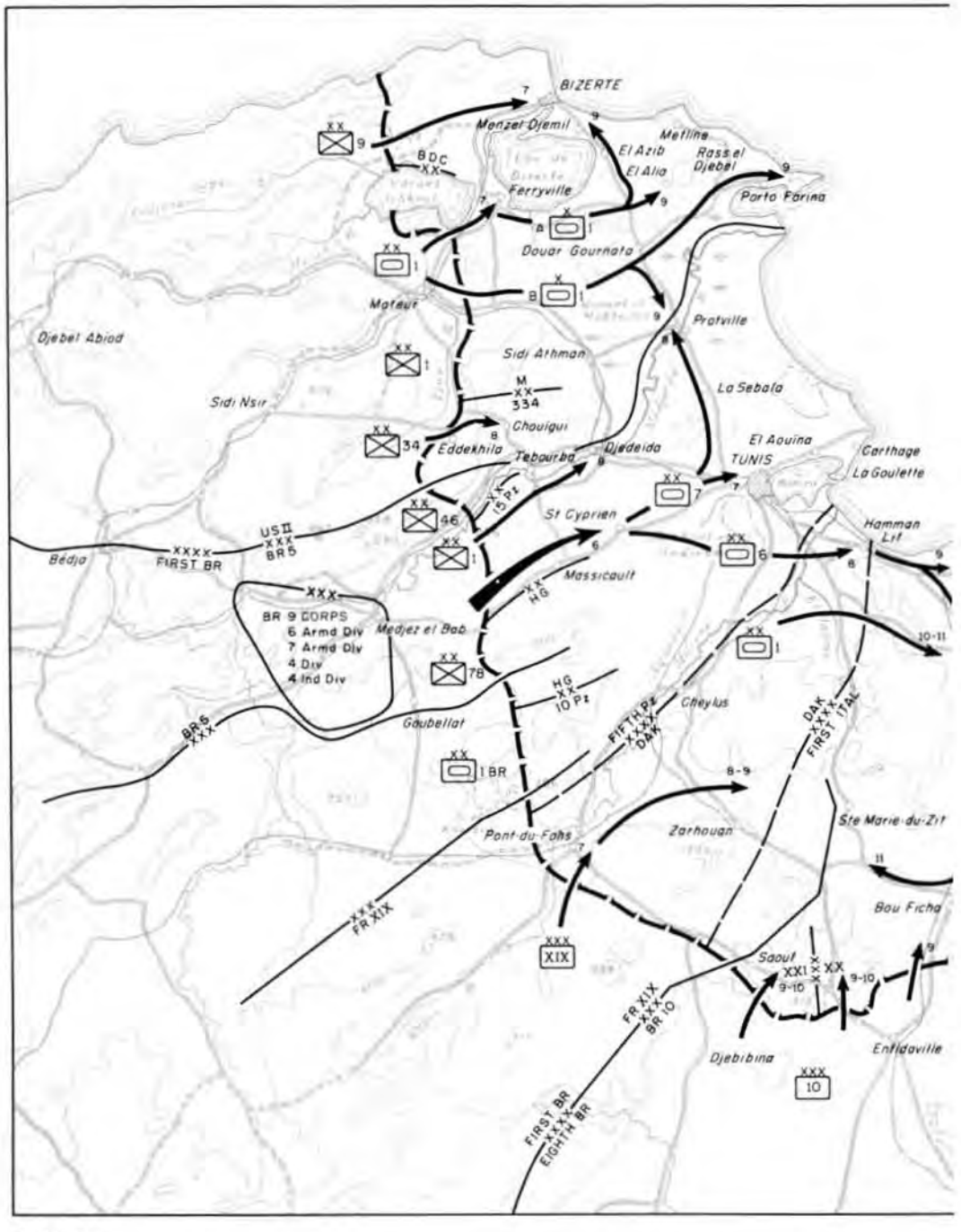
Regrouping and other preparations for the main attack could not be completed before 5 May, so the attack was to open with a French offensive on 4 May, then continue with seizure by British 5 Corps of Djebel Bou Aoukaz (226) southwest of Tebourba late on 5 May, and reach its climax in the combined air-ground assault on Massicault at dawn of 6 May. At the time these plans were formulated, it was hoped that, by 6 May, the U.S. II Corps would be nearing Mateur. For a time, 18 Army Group contemplated an amphibious operation against the Cap Bon peninsula, where, the Military Intelligence Division of the War Department had concluded, the enemy could be expected to concentrate, possibly for "a Bataan-like defense" in a series of positions. During this defense, intelligence officers reasoned, the enemy would evacuate as many troops as possible to protect Sicily from seizure.[5]

The fact of the matter was that, as the Italians had been informed in the Schloss Klessheim conference on 8 April, the enemy's high command had made its decision to fight on with no regard for evacuation or the possibility of defeat. On 1 May when the Italians through naval channels tried once more to get a hearing at Berlin for their view that there was no hope for saving Tunisia and that the Italian fleet should be thrown into an effort to secure Sardinia and Sicily, they were sharply rebuffed, and told that reinforcement of Tunisia was the only alternative to surrender

[3] 18 A Gp, Opns Instruc 13, 3 May 43, supplied by Cabinet Office, London.

[4] *Army Group Africa, Sitreps*, 4 May 43.

[5] (1) 18 A Gp Opn Instruc 13, 3 May 43, supplied by Cabinet Office, London. (2) First Army Opn Instruc 41, 4 May 43. DRB AGO. (3) Memo, Col James F. Torrence, Jr., for G–3 AFHQ, 5 May 43, sub: Liaison visit to 18 A Gp. AFHQ Micro Job 10A, Reel 6C. (4) Cbl, AGWAR to FREEDOM (G–2 WD to CinC AF), 6 May 43, CM-OUT 2139.


BIZERTE
Menzel Djemil
Metline
El Azib
El Alia
Rass el Djebel
Porto Farina
Ferryville
Douar Gournata
Mateur
Djebel Abiod
Sidi Athman
Protville
La Sebala
Sidi Nsir
Chouigui
Eddekhila
Tebourba
Djedeida
El Aouina
TUNIS
Carthage
La Goulette
St Cyprien
Hamman Lif
Bédja
Massicault
BR 9 CORPS
6 Armd Div
7 Armd Div
4 Div
4 Ind Div
Medjez el Bab
Cheylus
Gaubellat
Pont-du-Fahs
Zarhouan
Ste Marie-du-Zit
Bou Ficha
Saouf
Djebibina
Enfidaville

MAP 21



of the Axis ground forces in the Tunisian bridgehead.[6]

The reduced scale of the attacks on 26 April aroused some hopes of a longer lull in the Allied offensive, but Field Marshal Kesselring was even then convinced that the attacks would shortly pick up, and that the problem of reinforcement was critical. Almost all of General von Arnim's mobile reserves had already been committed. The troops were becoming exhausted. "Perhaps the present positions could be held with several battalions," Kesselring said to General Ambrosio, "but the present rate of transportation is too slow to bring the necessary reinforcements in time." He suggested the diversion to Tunisia of small ships then being used to convoy matériel to Sardinia, and in Hitler's name again proposed the temporary employment of a convoy of ships of the Italian Navy to carry up to one division from the backlog of German troops awaiting shipment to Tunisia. He repeatedly urged the use of Italian destroyers even for carrying supplies, since everything was needed at once—fuel, munitions, and men.[7]

In spite of British deception measures, the enemy expected the main attack by First Army in the general area where it was launched. He had intercepted Allied radio messages revealing the shift of major forces away from Montgomery's army to the British First Army. But knowing where to expect the main Allied thrust, even if it did

[6] The Italian view was urged on the German Naval High Command in Berlin by a representative of the Italian Naval Department, accompanied by Viceadmiral Friedrich Ruge, the German Admiral at *Supermarina*. *SKL, KTB, 1.-31.V.43*, pp. 6–8.

[7] Min of Confs, Ambrosio, Kesselring, and others, 27, 28 Apr, 4 May 43 in GMDS, Italian Collection, Item 26, Nos. 122, 124, 136. Quotation is from General Gause.

cost the British the benefit of surprise, could be of little consolation to von Arnim at a time when his capacity to counteract was subject to the severest strain. Nevertheless, *Army Group Africa* proceeded to implement the plan, first projected on 24 April, to mass all available mobile reserves in the threatened sector between the Medjerda river and the area northwest of Pont-du-Fahs. Concurrently with the general shortening of the lines of the *Fifth Panzer Army,* effected on 1–3 May, the Axis forces in the sector north of the Medjerda plain were reorganized. General von Vaerst assigned the sector from the coast to the northwestern corner of the Garaet Ichkeul to the *Bizerte Defense Command* (BDC) under General Kurt Bassenge. There a conglomeration of German, Italian, Navy, and Luftwaffe units manned the last defense line ahead of Bizerte. The harbor defenses could be of no value to them since these faced toward the sea. To form the backbone of an improvised line, 88-mm. Flak guns were hauled out of harbor defense positions. To the south of the salt lake, *Division von Manteuffel* (now commanded by General Buelowius) anchored its right wing on the bald eminence of Djebel Ichkeul (508). From there the line extended east and then south along the lesser ridges fringing the Tine river valley as far as a point in the hills northwest of Chouïgui pass. The greatly reduced *334th Infantry Division* (now under the command of General Fritz Krause) was next in the line which ended on the bank of the Medjerda river, north of the much contested Djebel Bou Aoukaz. From here to the Massicault–Tunis highway stood *Group Irkens.* Von Arnim, moving what reinforcements he could still comb from *Italian First Army* short of risking a collapse of its front, assigned to this most threatened sector the remaining elements of the *15th Panzer Division* (consisting mainly of the *115 Panzer Grenadier Regiment* and the *33d Antitank Battalion*). Although additional reinforcements were planned—such as antiaircraft battalions from the *19th Flak Division* and battle-tested units of the *10th Panzer* and *21st Panzer Divisions* still with *German Africa Corps*—they could not be brought in for lack of transportation and fuel. By 4 May, when these shifts had been accomplished, General Willibald Borowietz, Commanding General, *15th Panzer Division,* assumed personal command of this defense zone. The *Africa Corps* and *First Italian Army* sectors remained unchanged. In the Medjerda plain, nearer Tunis, *Fifth Panzer Army* organized a second blocking position and manned it with the remaining 88-mm. dual-purpose guns of the *20th Flak Division* (General Neuffer) and the *10th Panzer Reconnaissance Battalion.* After two days of costly seesaw battle at Djebel Bou Aoukaz, *Fifth Panzer Army*'s remaining armor totaled some 60 to 70 operational tanks and was assembled near Massicault. As the last substantial supply shipments reached Tunisia on 4 May they brought a desperately needed, though short-lived relief. Small vessels and ferries brought 1,100 tons of ammunition and 110 tons of fuel; transport planes landed 70 tons of fuel and another 30 tons of special types of ammunition.

In view of the possibility that an Allied armored thrust might achieve a breakthrough to Tunis and separate the Axis forces, enemy military leaders reached the agreement that troops found south of an Allied corridor, wherever it lay, would pass to the control of General Messe while those north of it would remain under command of

General von Vaerst.[8] Enemy airfields in Tunisia were cleared of almost all aircraft, including more than 400 single- and twin-engine fighters in operating condition, which were then crowded on the airdromes of Sicily. There they provided a vulnerable target for Allied bombers.[9]

The Liberation of Tunis

Allied bombing missions in preparation for the main 6 May attack through Massicault toward Tunis struck a series of targets: Protville, the area southwest of Tunis, the Cap Bon peninsula, and, on the night of 5–6 May, intermediate strongpoints between Tunis and its outer defenses. On that night, as the attack began, Wellington bombers from Misurata joined the Tactical Bomber Force in hitting areas near La Sebala and El Aouïna, Djedeïda, Tebourba, and Cheylus. During the preceding two days, the British 1st Infantry Division of the British 5 Corps had seized, and held against counterattacks, the heights of Djebel Bou Aoukaz, on the southern side of the Medjerda river.

Massed artillery that night dropped a dense pattern of shells on the selected zone of advance of British 9 Corps southeast of the mountain. General Crocker's 4th Indian Division on the left and the British 4th Division on the right of the Medjez el Bab–Massicault–Tunis highway prepared to attack at 0330. Fires then shifted to a rolling barrage. As the mists of dawn rolled away, the Allied air units launched the most intensive air attack thus far exhibited in Africa, deepening the area of bombardment in a zone three and one-half miles wide and four miles long. Within it, the area of Massicault and St. Cyprien received marked attention.[10] The infantry swept open a channel for the armor, and shortly after 1100, the British 6th and 7th Armoured Divisions with four battalions of Churchill tanks began rolling toward Massicault in great clouds of dust on a front of about 3,000 yards. Some of the antitank weapons which the enemy had so laboriously set up were demolished before they were fired. The attack overran the two battalions of the *115th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* and pushed back the remainder of the *15th Panzer Division* to Massicault. The British occupied Massicault in the latter part of the afternoon, completing the first stage of the Allied push. The attack was a success in spite of the fact that traffic had been dense, with units becoming intermingled as a result of insufficient signposts. General Borowietz's battered units strove during the night to establish a new line from Djedeïda to St. Cyprien, but their mobility was poor, and the fall of Tunis next day became certain. Indeed, General von Arnim wondered why the attack had stopped at all in view of the flimsy resistance remaining after Massicault had been taken.[11] General Crocker's 9 Corps resumed the offensive with his two armored divisions, while the British 4th and Indian 4th Infantry Divisions reverted to 5 Corps after nightfall. The armor proceeded to bypass

[8] (1) *Army Group Africa, Sitreps,* 24 Apr–4 May 43. (2) MS # D-001 (von Vaerst).

[9] Air Hist Branch, German Air Force, "A Tactical Appreciation of the Air War in Tunisia," 6, transl from Air Hist Branch, Air Ministry, London.

[10] (1) *Army Group Africa, Sitreps,* 6 May. (2) RAF 242d Group and XII Air Support Command flew 1,112 sorties, and Western Desert Air Force flew 924 on 5 May. Msg, First Army to FREEDOM, 6 May 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 44.

[11] (1) MS # S-098 (von Arnim). (2) *Army Group Africa, Sitreps,* 6 May 43.

St. Cyprien with the intention of taking it from the rear.

Next morning, the British 6th Armoured Division engaged the bulk of the German armored elements southeast of the village and drove them back toward the Sebkret es Sedjoumi. This success facilitated the operations of the British 7th Armoured Division at St. Cyprien. That division speedily overcame the defenders. Farther to the northwest the enemy abandoned Tebourba, while British tanks and armored cars of the 7th Armoured Division entered Le Bardo, a suburb of Tunis. Grinding past Le Bardo's grain elevator and railroad yards, and delayed only briefly by a brisk skirmish at the main highway junction west of the city, and by light sniping elsewhere, the foremost elements of the 22d Armoured Brigade were inside Tunis itself by midafternoon. The 1st Derbyshire Yeomanry and 11th Hussars mopped up during the night. Axis troops there were relatively few. Many had been sent up to the crumbling defense lines and others had withdrawn southward. The rapidity with which the British seized Tunis permitted the city to escape the general destruction inherent in a last-ditch defense, if indeed the Germans ever contemplated such a defense. Stalingrad, which Hitler had cited to Mussolini with unintentional irony as an example to be followed in Tunisia, was fortunately in no sense a model for what happened.

When the attack toward Tunis began, Allied aircraft spotted an Italian steamer waiting outside the harbor for naval escort and drove it back to shallow water near La Goulette, where it rested on the bottom on an even keel and sustained a series of air attacks. At the time of these attacks the ship was evacuating nearly 500 Allied prisoners, including men of the 1st Battalion, U.S. 16th Infantry, who had been captured on Hill 523, near Hill 609, earlier in the week. Although one man was killed and three were wounded, the remainder succeeded in getting ashore and returning to Tunis, from which the enemy was trying to escape. Some of the enemy readily surrendered to the Americans who had so recently themselves been in captivity.[12]

The enthusiasm of the populace for the arriving British units was dwarfed by the fervor of the greeting extended next morning to Generals Barré and Bergeron, and later in the day, to General Juin, the new Resident General of Tunisia. Six months previously, the Allied Force had landed in Algeria and Morocco and the first of the Axis emissaries had landed in Tunisia. The week of uncertainty which followed these first landings was to have no counterpart in May, for the fighting of the next few days in Tunisia could have but one outcome. To the rumble and smoke of battle from Hammam Lif, observable in Tunis, the city's population celebrated its deliverance. The 4th Zouaves and units of the 4th African Chasseurs on 9 May brought back to Tunis some of the troops of General Giraud's army.[13]

As the British attack rolled into Tunis the anticipated split of Axis forces took place. *Fifth Panzer Army* was confined to the area north of the Medjerda and east of the Tine rivers. The remnants of the *15th Panzer Division* with attached elements of the *10th Panzer* and *334th Infantry Divisions* withdrew to the north of the Medjerda. The

[12] Ltr, Colonel Denholm to author, 20 Feb 51.

[13] (1) CSTT Jnl, 7–9 May 43. (2) Barré, *Tunisie, 1942–1943*, pp. 302–03. (3) On 8 May, at 2400, the Allied forces set clocks ahead one hour to "B" time.



GEN. ALPHONSE JUIN. *Photograph taken when General Juin was Commander in Chief of all French Army Forces in North Africa.*

334th Infantry Division was immobilized in the mountains around Eddekhila and Chouïgui pass and for lack of fuel was forced to fight to the end wherever they happened to stand, as were von Manteuffel's forces. General von Vaerst moved his command post to El Alia, east of Lac de Bizerte, and on 9 May passed out of communication with *Headquarters, Army Group Africa.* Von Arnim was left with the *German Africa Corps* and *First Italian Army* and attempted to build up a new defense line across the base of the Cap Bon peninsula from Hammam Lif through the mountains to Zarhouan and Enfidaville. He assigned the *Hermann Goering Division* to General Cramer's *German Africa Corps.* Threatened with encirclement from the north, the division was ordered to fall back to the Hammam Lif position where a Flak regiment of General Frantz's *19th Flak Division* and a parachute battalion were building up a powerful blocking position. During the night of 8–9 May, *Army Group Africa* rushed the two battalions of *Panzer Grenadier Regiment Africa* and an artillery battalion to the same position. After the *Hermann Goering Division* had extricated its units it was inserted to the south of that defense line. The remainder of the *Africa Corps'* new front was held by elements of the *10th Panzer Division* which had withdrawn into the mountains east of Cheylus. Next, the *21st Panzer Division* (−), *Division Superga,* and *Kampfgruppe Schmidt* (at the end commanded by Colonel Pfeiffer) fought their way back to the area of Zarhouan and north of the town.[14]

Bizerte Falls to the U.S. II Corps

When an enemy counterattack failed to materialize after the fall of Mateur, it was apparent that the II Corps needed only to complete its regrouping and reconnaissance before renewing the assault. General Bradley advanced his command post from the vicinity of Bédja to that of Sidi Nsir. Eastern Base Section took over some of II Corps' supply points in the Djebel Abiod and Bédja areas, and established new dumps along the two major roads leading toward Mateur and Chouïgui pass, while the Americans bridged the streams near Mateur at several points. Northeast of Mateur, a reconnaissance in force by Combat Command B on 5 May drew enough antitank and artillery

[14] (1) *Army Group Africa, Sitreps,* 7–9 May 43. (2) MS # C–098 (von Arnim). (3) MS # D–001 (von Vaerst).



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fire to demonstrate the enemy's defensive positions.[15]

The II Corps planned to resume its general attack on 6 May in conformity with the plans of 18 Army Group. The 9th Infantry Division was to drive against the hills, north of Garaet Ichkeul and eventually to overcome the fortified positions which the enemy had occupied in anticipation of attack on Bizerte. Combat Command A, 1st Armored Division, was to seize Ferryville, east of the Garact Ichkeul on Lac de Bizerte, and to cover the southern side of the lake, while Combat Command B cleared the route from Mateur toward Djedeïda. The 1st Infantry Division on the north and the 34th Infantry Division on the south would at the same time attack the enemy in the hills east of the Tine river, including those heights abutting Chouïgui pass. The enemy was making extensive use of the pass. Such dispositions reflected the exchange of zones earlier planned for the 1st and 34th Infantry Divisions, since the 1st Infantry Division had

[15] (1) 1st Armd Div AAR, 2 May 43. (2) Robinett, Among the First, MS, p. 503. In private possession. (3) Casualties in II Corps in the week ending 6 May were: killed 112, wounded 870, missing 432, evacuated 798. Strength was 94,202. Prisoners taken were 1,344. Rpt, AG II Corps to 18 A Gp, 8 May 43, in II Corps G 4 Jnl.

continued generally northeastward while the 34th Infantry Division sideslipped southward from the vicinity of Hill 609 and then drove eastward along the Sidi Nsir–Chouïgui road. Both divisions, moreover, crossed the route of advance of the 1st Armored Division, although after 4–5 May, the bulk of that armored unit had already reached the vicinity of Mateur. With the corps antiaircraft and engineer units as well as the various elements of these divisions shifting into place, traffic became unavoidably congested at the road fork eleven miles south of Mateur and only skillful regulation of movement and Allied air superiority enabled the next attack to be mounted on schedule and without risk of disaster.[16] Before daylight on 6 May, from north of the Garaet Ichkeul to Pont-du-Fahs, the Allied forces were once more on the offensive.

The II Corps made satisfactory progress on 6–7 May against an enemy who manifested no diminution in his will to resist. The northern wing of the attack, which was already in motion on 5 May, had to press past Djebel Cheniti (209), a dominating height about fifteen miles from Bizerte just north of the Garaet Ichkeul, and to traverse a narrowing shelf with but one road along the salt lake. The 1st and 3d Battalions, 60th Infantry, relieving the battered Corps Franc d'Afrique, acquired Djebel Cheniti on 6–7 May after the preliminary seizure of adjacent ridges to the north by the 47th Infantry. The crossing of the Douimis river proved less difficult than had been anticipated. Before noon on 7 May, Company A, 751st Tank Battalion (medium tanks), and the 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion were on the eastern side of it, hunting for enemy units along the northern flank. The 9th Reconnaissance Troop approached Bizerte along the road to the east with the imminent prospect of reaching the city's outer limits at midday.[17] Early seizure to forestall sabotage of the port was of vital importance. General Bradley accordingly ordered General Eddy to rush an occupying force to the city.

Reconnaissance elements of the 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion reported their entry into Bizerte at 1615, 7 May. They had followed the 9th Reconnaissance Troop as it cleared mines along the road from the west, and close behind them came the first two tanks of Company A, 751st Tank Battalion. Troops comprising the spearhead of the 9th Infantry Division's attack quickly verified earlier reports from prisoners and from the 9th Reconnaissance Troop that the enemy had pulled back through Bizerte, had abandoned the city, and was now in position along the far side of the ship channel to Lac de Bizerte. Indeed, enemy guns fired on American troops, from points southwest of the city, while in the city itself movement was subject to sniping, to mines, and to booby traps. Extensive demolition was attributable to recent bombing and enemy sabotage. Units of the 15th and 20th Engineers cleared away wreckage and removed mines and booby traps in the city during the night. Official entry was to come with the arrival of elements of the Corps Franc d'Afrique on 8 May.[18]

On orders received early in the evening, 7 May, the 47th Infantry with elements of the

[16] II Corps G–3 Jnl, 4–5 May 43, *passim*.

[17] (1) II Corps AAR, 15 May 43. (2) 9th Div AAR, 10 Sep 43. (3) Plan of Attack for 7 May, dated 6 May 43, and Msg, 7 May 43, Entry 43, in 9th Div G–3 Jnl. (4) 751st Tank Bn AAR. (5) Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, p. 93.

[18] For the time of entry by the 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion, see (1) Msgs, 7 May 43, Entries 65 and 67, in 9th Div G–3 Jnl, and (2) Msg, 7 May 43, Entry 394, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.



TROOPS OF 60TH INFANTRY *on the afternoon of 7 May just before entering Bizerte.*

894th Tank Destroyer Battalion in support started on a march of 8–10 miles to a sector only two and a half miles southwest of Bizerte. The 2d Battalion was put in positions of defense along the shore of the ship channel while the other two battalions occupied heights overlooking the lake and the city. In Bizerte, the Cannon Company's forward observer, 2d Lt. Orion C. Shockley, had taken up an observation post on the roof of the Hotel de la Marine. From this vantage point he was able at daylight to direct counterbattery fire across the channel against positions from which the enemy had been shelling the 47th Infantry during the night. This fire silenced some eight artillery pieces and other lighter weapons.[19]

Very early on 8 May, the 47th Infantry entered Bizerte, then withdrew while French troops completed the mopping up. When the regiment returned on 11 May, fewer than a dozen natives were on the sidewalks to observe the procession through the battered streets.

U.S. II Corps Pushes Beyond Mateur

Following the occupation of Mateur on 3 May, the U.S. 1st Armored Division established contact with the 9th Infantry Division southwest of the Garaet Ichkeul and, while preparing to defend its possession of Mateur, reconnoitered for subsequent operations to gain control of the routes leading from the town to the north or the east. The incentive to begin the next stage of the attack at once, before the enemy could consolidate his defensive positions in the heights along these

[19] 47th Inf Hist, 1943.



TANKS AND INFANTRYMEN IN BIZERTE, *7 May 1943. Note bomb-damaged building behind tank.*

routes, was strong but General Harmon and his principal unit commanders were reluctant to attack until the division was able to construct ample bridges near Mateur to replace those destroyed by the enemy, to reconnoiter, and to strike an overwhelming blow. Thus the main offensive beyond Mateur opened only on 6 May, after a reconnaissance in force had ascertained the enemy's strength and dispositions. The enemy had to be ready to meet attacks along either or both routes. He concealed his antitank gun positions until some Sherman tanks of Company H, 13th Armored Regiment, drew fire. These tanks had been committed on 5 May to the east of Mateur and north of the Mateur–Tunis highway, in what may have seemed like the beginning of the main Allied attack. The recent multiplication of American armor in the II Corp's assault was met in part by a transfer of enemy dual-purpose 88-mm. guns from locations in which they had been defending various targets against air attack to sites on the ridges from which to stop the tanks.

American operations near Mateur were subject to enemy observation and resistance from the bold cone of Djebel Ichkeul, the steep-sided hill just south of Garaet Ichkeul, and from a line of antiaircraft gun positions running along the belt of hills and ridges south of Lac de Bizerte. Djebel Ichkeul was brought under partial control by the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron on 4–5 May, although several hundred men of the *Reconnaissance Battalion, Hermann Goering Di-*

vision and their French captives continued to hold out in its coves and other strong positions for another week.[20]

The 1st Armored Division attacked on 6 May with Combat Command A under Colonel Lambert driving along the route to Ferryville and Combat Command B under Col. Clarence C. Benson pushing into the hills north of the Mateur–Djedeïda road.[21] At 0445, before dawn, both operations began. Combat Command A occupied hills about seven miles southwest of Ferryville against light resistance, but a series of enemy counterattacks by tank-supported infantry regained some of the heights. That night the Americans won back these losses. Early on the morning of 7 May, Combat Command A started northward toward Ferryville in what became a running fight past the extremely narrow point four miles southwest of that place.[22] It is at this point that the hills and the Garaet Ichkeul are closest. The force occupied the town that afternoon and prepared to drive to the east on 8 May.

Combat Command B's part of the attack on 6 May had as its major objective a road junction about six miles east of Mateur. Both the 2d and 3d Battalions, 13th Armored Regiment, and elements of the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion opened the attack just as a brilliant sun broke above the horizon behind the enemy, completely masking his positions. The 2d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment (Lt. Col. Henry E. Gardiner), ran at once into strong opposition which stopped its attack with a loss of seven tanks. Colonel Gardiner was wounded and remained missing until after dark. Command of the 2d Battalion passed to the regimental executive officer, Lt. Col. Hamilton H. Howze. The 3d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment (Lt. Col. Ben Crosby), was driven back. To pierce the enemy barrier, a stronger force and much heavier artillery preparation seemed to be required. While the enemy was kept under persistent American artillery fire the 2d Battalion prepared another attack for late afternoon. Most of Crosby's battalion tried to strike the enemy's north flank from the Ferryville road without success. The heaviest available artillery concentration (fifty-four guns) blanketed the area of attack and laid smoke on the southern flank, where the antitank guns appeared to be the most plentiful. While the German gunners kept under cover, the tanks and tank destroyers started over the crest and across the valley in the formation of a hollow trapezoid, followed by a second wave of six tanks and nine tank destroyers. They overran the strongpoints and despite heavy antitank fire, reached the top of the next rise, hesitated there for a few critical minutes, and then proceeded for some two miles before darkness required organization in place for the night. The battalion shifted position just before dawn to escape being caught in daylight within a ring of antitank guns, and continued carefully eastward on 7 May past the road junction against

[20] (1) Rpt, 10 May 43, Entry 141, in II Corps Jnl. (2) 1st Armd Div Hist, Vol. IX. (3) Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, pp. 97–99.

[21] (1) General Robinett had been wounded by a shell on the previous day. (2) Lt. Col. Leonard H. Nason, "Reconnaissance by Medium Armor–Mateur, May 1943," *Military Review*, XXIII, No. 10 (January, 1944), pp. 55–57.

[22] Combat Command A, 1st Armored Division, then consisted of the following: Headquarters, Combat Command A; 6th Armored Infantry (less the 1st Battalion); 3d Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment; 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment; 58th and 91st Field Artillery Battalions; and elements of 81st Reconnaissance Battalion and 91st Reconnaissance Squadron. It was reinforced during the day by the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry (attached from the 9th Infantry Division). See AAR's of 1st Armd Div, CCA and CCB 1st Armd Div, 6th Armd Inf, 1st Armd Regt, and 3d Bn 13th Armd Regt.

moderate resistance. Combat Command B's losses on 6 May were approximately 60 men and 12 tanks, plus 15 tanks briefly knocked out. Behind the 2d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, the Reconnaissance Company of that unit mopped up 135 prisoners and 2 47-mm. guns. On 7 May, Ferryville was cut off and the enemy south of Lac de Bizerte were near encirclement. Casualties that day were lighter, and about twice as many prisoners were captured.[23]

The 1st Infantry Division's depleted units on 6 May made an aggressive attack against troops of the *Luftwaffe Regiment Barenthin* in the hills just east of the Tine river, where, in a narrow valley, it flows north beside the Mateur–Chouïgui road. General Bradley at this point expected the division merely to keep the enemy under pressure but General Allen felt that he should resume the drive of 23 April–1 May.[24] The 18th Infantry, after crossing on two newly prepared bridges, was ordered to attack eastward against a djebel about seven miles southwest of Mateur, with the 26th Infantry on its southern flank. Company H, 1st Armored Regiment, furnished support. The attack opened auspiciously at 0300, but soon ran into difficulties. The 3d Battalion, 18th Infantry, on the left diverged to the northeast from its planned route of approach and lost contact with the 1st Battalion. It was caught on the open plain at daylight near the base of an enemy-occupied hill and subjected to the devastating crossfire of machine guns and mortars. The 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, was next driven off a hill into the shelter of a wadi where it seemed likely to be cut off. Only four of the tanks which were to furnish support got across the Tine river before the bridge collapsed, forcing the remainder to confine their participation to direct fire. The division's attack became an effort chiefly to extricate the pinned-down elements of the 18th Infantry while avoiding exposure of the 26th Infantry's northern flank, and to hold the enemy where he was. The 26th Infantry pushed two battalions onto foothills, and broke up an enemy counterattack against its 3d Battalion with the aid of the 33d Field Artillery Battalion. General Allen alerted the 2d and 3d Battalions, 16th Infantry, for action in aid of the 18th Infantry, but did not use them, confining the 1st Infantry Division's commitments to troops already in contact with the enemy. In order to protect the division's north flank, he had the 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, echeloned to the west of the 18th Infantry for greater depth in defense. Darkness permitted the 18th Infantry to pull back. This move in turn necessitated withdrawal by the 26th Infantry. Except for patrols, the 1st Infantry Division broke contact with the enemy and occupied positions on the western bank of the Tine river.[25]

The first elements of the U.S. 3d Infantry Division (less 7th Regimental Combat Team) came forward for possible commitment. The last elements of the division left Aïn M'lilla on 7 May in time to reach their concentration area before morning, while the leading unit, Combat Team 15, assembled in the rear of the 1st Infantry Division's positions. General Truscott expected the 15th and 30th Combat Teams to pass through the division on the night of 10 May

[23] (1) Lt Col Hamilton H. Howze, Action East of Mateur, 6 May 1943, MS. In private possession. (2) Interv with Col Howze, 15 Nov 50. (3) 1st Armd Div AAR, 2 May 43. (4) CCB 1st Armd Div AAR, 13 May 43.

[24] Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, p. 93.

[25] (1) 18th Inf AAR (Capt Thomas E. Bennett), 15 Apr–8 May 43. (2) 26th Inf Unit Jnl, 6–8 May 43. (3) 1st Div G–3 Opns Rpt, 15 Apr–7 May 43.

to complete mopping up in the eastern extremities of the II Corps zone.[26] Before it could be put into effect, this plan was altered by the sudden collapse of enemy resistance.

Operations on the extreme southern flank of II Corps in the final phase of the attack passed to the 34th Infantry Division. General Ryder gave his unit commanders oral orders on 4 May. His division had the mission of seizing Chouïgui pass, the high ground north and south of it, and Chouïgui village held by the *334th Infantry Division.* Before the general attack of the corps on 6 May, the 34th Infantry Division began an attempt to occupy the village of Eddekhila in the southeastern corner of the Tine valley. Patrols on the afternoon of 4 May made no contact with the enemy when they went to Eddekhila and the adjacent hills. But by this time well aware of the enemy's habitual care to avoid revealing his presence except to the main body of an attacking force, the Americans carefully prepared a reconnaissance in force for the next morning. The route, moreover, was to be along the foothills at the southern edge of the valley rather than on the more exposed, if smoother, ground nearer the stream. The 168th Infantry, supported by the 175th Field Artillery Battalion, led the advance on 5 May in column of battalions, with a reconnaissance platoon and the Antitank Company protecting the left flank. West of Eddekhila the head of this column ran into resistance too strong to be overcome in daylight without disproportionate losses. Artillery fire from the left and front, mortar and long-range machine gun fire from the right and right rear, and unfavorable rising ground ahead without sufficient cover, made it inadvisable to rush forward. Instead, a night attack by two battalions abreast, each advancing on a 1,000-yard front behind a swift rolling barrage from four battalions of light and two battalions of medium artillery, was scheduled. A third battalion was to push over the hills to the south, protecting that flank and tying in with the British. In this way, the 34th Infantry Division was to participate on 6 May in the general offensive throughout the II Corps zone.[27]

The infantry assault on 6 May got past Eddekhila and into the heights east of it but when the supporting artillery barrage was lifted, the enemy returned to his machine gun and mortar positions, and severely hurt two infantry battalions while they tried to reorganize for a second advance. Throughout the day, the three battalions of the 168th Infantry and the 1st and 3d Battalions, 133d Infantry, pushed into the hills south and east of Eddekhila toward the area in which Generals Nehring and Fischer had thrown back the first Allied attempt to reach Tunis in November 1942. Progress was slow and the Americans gained no dominating height. On 7 May, when they resumed the attack at 0500, they continued to advance northeastward over several crests but were stopped just short of the pass. They continued their pressure on the defenders until, just before dawn the next day, the enemy hurriedly withdrew.

The II Corps' participation in the last great offensive by the Allies had by darkness on 7 May arrived at its final phase. Advance elements of the U.S. 9th Infantry Division held Bizerte, from which the enemy had withdrawn. The U.S. 1st Armored Division had cut the road and railway connections

[26] Msg, II Corps to FREEDOM, 8 May 43, AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

[27] 168th Inf Hist, 12 Nov 42–15 May 43, pp. 47–54.

between Bizerte and Tunis via Ferryville or Mateur at several places. It had driven the enemy back from his prepared line of defense at some points and had pierced that line east of Mateur and Ferryville. The fighting elements of General von Vaerst's *Fifth Panzer Army* facing the II Corps had been driven into three separate segments in the hills around the Lac de Bizerte, east of the Tine river, and northwest of Tunis. The numbers of Germans readily surrendering had suddenly swelled. Shortages of fuel and of all types of ammunition rendered the enemy's final line a brittle crust more likely to shatter than to sag. For General Bradley's command, the remaining operations were to consist of a number of deep thrusts to the water's edge at the extreme eastern limit of the II Corps zone, thrusts meant to divide the enemy's forces into smaller, disorganized fragments.

Total Surrender in the North

Early on 8 May, a Royal Navy motor torpedo unit tried to enter Bizerte harbor but was driven off by shore batteries near it.[28] It was evident that the defenders along the coast would have to be cleared out by ground attack from the rear. For this part of the final attack near Bizerte, Combat Command A, U.S. 1st Armored Division, established two task forces to move from Ferryville around the southern and eastern rim of Lac de Bizerte. The first, consisting of the 3d Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment (Lt. Col. Lydon B. Cole), and the 2d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, late on 7 May moved out to seize a crossing over the Ben Koceine river, about four miles southeast of Ferryville, and was ready next morning to work along the right (south) flank, while the second, consisting of the 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment (Lt. Col. Frank F. Carr), and the 3d Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, advanced along a route nearest the lake. The enemy had emplaced numerous antitank guns and self-propelled artillery pieces in the hills that commanded the flat shore, and near Bizerte, had a battery of 105-mm. dual-purpose antiaircraft guns equipped with radar. These guns were able to reach targets near El Azib, toward which Colonel Carr's task force was heading. Supported by the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron (less Troop A), and the 58th and 91st Armored Field Artillery Battalions, the attack progressed along the hills during the forenoon toward the southeastern sector of the lake shore.

That afternoon, Carr's force swung northward to seize El Azib. In a narrow corridor between the lake and a ridge to the southeast, the battalion sent two companies of light tanks with directions to "drive like hell, pray, and rally in a wooded area a mile south of El Azib."[29] At 25–30 miles an hour, the tanks roared northward, exposed for about eight minutes before they reached the cover of trees. Six tanks remained behind, knocked out along the way. The others, soon reinforced by part of the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron, overcame all local resistance. By nightfall, the enemy forces which had abandoned Bizerte were cut off from retreat at Menzel Djemil on the highway, and next morning, American units reached the coast to the north.

From its night positions of 8–9 May controlling a road junction six miles southeast

[28] Msg G/62, 18 A Gp to FREEDOM, 9 May 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

[29] (1) 1st Bn 13th Armd Regt AAR, 8 May 43, dated 20 May 43. (2) 3d Bn 1st Armd Regt Hist, 19 May 43.

of El Azib, the 3d Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, pressed east between Carr's force on its left and Howze's force advancing on its right. Hundreds of prisoners began pouring in at daylight, and were collected at a point about one mile south of the road junction. The enemy in front of Combat Command B on the southeast, in spite of continued resistance, was driven back into the path of Colonel Coe's right company. By midmorning, from the vicinity of El Alia, the 3d Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, was preparing a drive on Metline to the north when it received word of the surrender of all the enemy facing II Corps, and new orders which turned the force toward the coast west of Metline. The first resistance it received, which came from a group of ten German tanks after the surrender, was abruptly terminated when the enemy learned of the situation, ignited his own tanks, and hastened off toward the north.[30]

Colonel Benson on 8 May ordered Colonel Howze, with reinforcements,[31] to cut the Bizerte–Tunis highway, a mission which required him to approach by either an exposed route at the northern edge of the Garaet el Mabtouha, west of Protville, or over the hills five miles farther to the north. The dangers of the mountain crossing were great but the prospect of thus surprising the enemy was alluring. If the tanks could be forced over the mountains, at the risk of ignominious failure, their success would be all the more complete. Colonel Howze chose the mountain route and, starting at 1230, led his column of tanks, tank destroyers, and infantry over the craggy slopes, deep gullies, and rugged shoulders, terrain that at several points was seemingly impassable. Late on 8 May they arrived at the final slope, above the main highway near Douar Gournata, where a road to Porto Farina branches off the main highway, and near an enemy airfield. They were greeted by 88-mm. shelling, but the appearance of their forty tanks in such a totally unexpected quarter doubtless contributed to the enemy's awareness of defeat. Colonel Howze deferred the descent of his force to the plain until daylight, but all during the night, saw hundreds of burning enemy vehicles dotting the plain while tracer ammunition, being expended before an imminent collapse, laced the sky. At sunrise on 9 May, and throughout the day, the enemy surrendered in droves while this mobile force continued to the northeast, out along the coastal road, as far as Rass el Djebel. On the right of Task Force Howze, the 3d Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, now under Lt. Col. Bogardus S. Cairns, drove toward Protville and cut the road between Tunis and Bizerte during the night of 8–9 May. Next day on Colonel Benson's orders the unit pushed northeastward to Rass Sidi Ali el Mekki (then known as Cap Farina), where it prevented enemy evacuation in small barges.

Part of the 1st Armored Regiment—the Reconnaissance Company and 3d Battalion—had participated in operations northeast of Bédja ever since 23 April, as already pointed out, while the remainder of the regiment was held in II Corps reserve. During 6–7 May, Colonel Hains's command was brought to the vicinity of Mateur, and on 8 May, after the 1st Battalion, 1st Ar-

[30] (1) 3d Bn 1st Armd Regt Hist, 19 May 43. (2) CCA 1st Armd Div AAR, 3–7 May 43.

[31] They were the following: the 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry (less one company); Company A, 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion; Company B, 81st Reconnaissance Battalion; Battery A, 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion (self-propelled 105-mm. howitzers); a platoon, 16th Armored Engineer Battalion.

mored Regiment, had been attached to Combat Command B, and the 3d Battalion, 39th Infantry, and reinforced 68th Armored Field Artillery Battalion had been placed under Hains's control, the force moved eastward to take up defensive positions near the edge of Garaet el Mabtouha. The 1st Battalion, moving ahead of this force, got about twelve miles along the same Mateur–Djedeïda road before being stopped by an enemy group. On the morning of 9 May, it continued its sweep around the southern limits of the salt marsh, turning eastward at Sidi Athman along a road link leading to the main Tunis–Bizerte highway. Near Protville, where the II Corps boundary ran along the northwestern bank of the Medjerda river, troops of the British 7th Armoured Division were found to be already in control. Swinging northward toward Bizerte, and branching northeastward to Porto Farina, the armored column pushed along the corps boundary. By nightfall, enemy forces along the lower section of the Medjerda river had been completely destroyed. Wholesale surrenders were making the process of mopping up more tedious than risky.[32]

The 34th Infantry Division had taken the heights on the southern side of Chouïgui pass during the first two days of the last offensive, and on the night of 7–8 May were preparing to attack the hills on the northern side at daylight. After the success of the attacks on Tunis and Bizerte, and the evacuation of Tebourba and Djedeïda on 7 May, continued operations to seize the hills seemed unnecessary. Indeed, daylight revealed that the pass was defended by only a few riflemen, either stragglers or an expendable rear guard. By 0800, 8 May, the division not only held the dominating heights adjacent to the pass but had a patrol in Chouïgui village, east of it. The fighting elements of the *334th Infantry Division* were attempting to reach a line beyond the Mateur–Djedeïda road. In midmorning, a British patrol from the Tebourba area appeared at Chouïgui. What remained was to corral the thousands upon thousands of the enemy who sought the opportunity to surrender, and to mop up the encircled areas.[33]

The opportunity to exploit the situation by continuing across the coastal plain, perhaps to Tunis, was tempting to General Ryder's men, who had struggled through the hills since 24 April. But the boundary between U.S. II Corps and British 5 Corps had been carefully defined, and the Americans were under the most explicit admonitions to remain northwest of the Medjerda river. The 34th Division reassembled its battalions, sent patrols to Djedeïda, outposted the hills near Eddekhila, investigated the food resources of its area, and mopped up.[34]

By the afternoon of 8 May, the Axis forces under *Fifth Panzer Army* had been isolated in two major pockets. The northern group, consisting mainly of *Fifth Panzer Army* headquarters and the remainder of *Division von Manteuffel* and *15th Panzer Division* (with elements of the *10th Panzer Division*) fought under the personal command of General von Vaerst in the hills north of Garaet el Mabtouha and El Alia, preparing to make their last stand in El Alia and the hills to the northeast.[35] After having lost contact with the south, the very con-

[32] (1) 1st Armd Div AAR, 2 May 43. (2) 1st Armd Regt AAR, 10 Jul 43. (3) 3d Bn 13th Armd Regt Hist, 1942–43.

[33] (1) 168th Inf Hist, 12 Nov 42–15 May 43, pp. 54–55. (2) 133d Inf Hist, 1943, IV, 14.

[34] Msg, 10 May 43, Entry 78, in II Corps G–3 Jnl.

[35] (1) *Army Group Africa, Sitreps,* 8 and 9 May 43. (2) MS # D–001 (von Vaerst).

siderable enemy force trapped near Bizerte might have tried to recross the ship channel to make a last stand in the streets and buildings of the city, but any such desperate endeavor was forestalled by the prompt organization of a provisional American force along the northwestern side of the channel with antitank, automatic, and artillery weapons.

In the other pocket to the southwest, beyond some twenty miles of Allied-held ground and the impassable salt marshes, the *334th Infantry Division* and small groups of other units were encircled in the hills between Mateur and Tebourba. The hope that these troops could fight their way out of the pocket and join the main group to the northeast had to be abandoned early on 8 May. On the eastern half of the solitary peak of Djebel Ichkeul, making good use of caves dug into the mountainside, was a group of less than 300 men of the *Reconnaissance Battalion Hermann Goering,* defying surrender until 10 May. At 0930 in the morning of 9 May General von Vaerst sent his last situation report to von Arnim: "Our armor and artillery have been destroyed; without ammunition and fuel; we shall fight to the last." [36] At 1000 his emissaries reached General Harmon's headquarters to request an armistice while the surrender of all troops north of Tunis was being arranged. General Bradley's headquarters, when apprised of this development, transmitted instructions in the formula decreed at Casablanca: "The terms of surrender are unconditional." By noon, these terms had been accepted.[37] At 1250, General Harmon reported the surrender of the *10th Panzer* and *15th Panzer Divisions.* Eventually, the number of enemy prisoners reached the surprising total of almost 40,000.[38] Generals Gustav von Vaerst, Fritz Krause, Karl Buelowius, and Willibald Borowietz of the German Army, and Generals Kurt Bassenge and Georg Neuffer of the German Air Force, spent 9–10 May in custody at Headquarters, II Corps, near Mateur, and were then transferred to Headquarters, British First Army. Another prisoner taken at this time was Major Hans Baier, the somewhat legendary commander of the *Regiment Barenthin.*[39]

The Fighting Ends in the South

The end of operations north of the Allied corridor to Tunis which the British First Army's attack of 6–7 May had created, came sooner than it did to the south. A considerably larger proportion of the enemy's forces remained on that side, where they were enclosed by the British 5 and 9 Corps, the French XIX Corps, and the British Eighth Army, but were in an area better adapted to prolonged defense. The first objective of the Allies was to cut them off from the sea and from Cap Bon peninsula, where enemy troops might have held out for an extended period. The British 6th Armoured Division, followed by British 4th Division, went southward along the Tunis–Hammamet–Enfidaville road to block retirement into a peninsular redoubt. The

[36] *Army Group Africa, Sitreps,* 9 May 43.

[37] (1) Msg, 9 May 43, Entry 12, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) II Corps AAR, 10 Sep 43. (3) *Fifth Panzer Army* was out of communication with *Army Group Africa.* Morning Report, 1015/8 May 43, in *Army Group Africa, Sitreps.*

[38] (1) *Ibid.,* No. 24. (2) Msg 39, II Corps to FREEDOM, 9 May, AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 64. (3) Bradley, *A Soldier's Story,* pp. 97–99.

[39] (1) Msg, 9 May 43, Entry 56, in II Corps G–3 Jnl. (2) II Corps AAR, 10 Sep 43. (3) Msg, FREEDOM to USFOR, 10 May 43, NAF 218. (4) 1st Armd Div AAR, 2 May 43.

British 1st Armoured Division, now under 9 Corps, cut across eastward from the Goubellat area to reinforce them. The British armored column reached Hamman Lif defile, a gap of 300 yards between cliff and surf, only to find it strongly defended by *Kampfgruppe Frantz* armed with antitank guns and other artillery (see p. 651 above). Here was a Tunisian Thermopylae. For approximately two days the defenders successfully repulsed all attacks of the 6th Armoured Division, later reinforced by the 1st Armoured Division, and defied all stratagems. Then a tank force, risking immobilization and destruction, succeeded in navigating a course over the firm wet sand at the very edge of the surf. The tanks broke into the enemy's positions, and cleared the way for an accelerated rush to Hammamet by the entire column.

On 10 May, as the French celebrated the liberation of Tunis, the campaign was being brought to a close farther south. British 26th Armoured Brigade of the 6th Armoured Division captured Soliman about 1400. Three hours later, the 2d Armoured Brigade of the same division had advanced as far as Grombalia, almost half way across the base of Cap Bon peninsula, and was pushing on to the southeast. Elements of the brigade penetrated the area west of Grombalia between the Tunis–Enfidaville highway and the El Hamma river. Patrols of the 12th Royal Lancers linked up with the French XIX Corps in the vicinity of Zarhouan. Pockets of enemy resistance still held out in Zarhouan, and the enemy counterattacked unsuccessfully at a point five miles west of that town.[40] *Army Group Africa*'s headquarters moved from the northern side of Cap Bon peninsula to the mountains between Zarhouan and Hammamet and joined there headquarters of the *German Africa Corps.*[41]

Elaborate naval and air plans to prevent enemy withdrawal from Tunisia to Italian territory were ready in what was designated, perhaps with Norway and Dunkerque in mind, as Operation RETRIBUTION. It was supposed that the Axis high command would first extricate specialists needed for the defense of Italy, at least, and in a second phase would attempt an unselective transfer of as many men as possible. The overwhelming naval and air superiority of the Allies permitted plans to employ enough warships and airplanes to thwart such Axis withdrawals.[42] Actually, only a very limited effort was made to salvage German specialists and none at all to bring back to Sicily the troop units so necessary for its defense. The enemy's means of transportation and escort were so far below requirement as to condemn such an attempt to failure from the start. The strength of the concentration of British naval vessels at Malta, Bône, and Algiers was not tested. From the sea the British shelled possible points of exit from

[40] (1) 18 A Gp Sitrep 199, 1800, 10 May 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log. (2) *Army Group Africa,* Daily Report, 10 May 43, in *Army Group Africa, Sitreps.*

[41] (1) Map, *Lage Nordafrika* (1: 500,000) *Gen-StdH/Op Abt IIIb, Pruef Nr. 24139,* evening 8 May 43. (2) MS #C-098 (von Arnim).

[42] The Italian Navy was credited with 5 battleships, 6 cruisers, 25 serviceable destroyers and 80 lesser craft, and 25 submarines. Twelve German submarines were considered available to the enemy. Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, was prepared to use 3 battleships, 8 cruisers, 40 destroyers, 23 mine sweepers and trawlers, and 14 flotillas of smaller motor craft. Allied aircraft were estimated at 744 bombers, not including torpedo bombers, compared to 640 Axis bombers based in Sicily and Sardinia, and Allied fighters at almost 1,000, greatly exceeding those available to the Axis in the southern half of the Sicilian strait. Appendixes II, III, CinC, Med No. 00235/22, 13 Apr 43.



GEN. JUERGEN VON ARNIM *after the surrender. Behind him on the left is Maj. Gen. Hans Cramer.*

the Cap Bon peninsula on 10–11 May, and eventually intercepted enough small craft to yield a total of some 77 prisoners from them, while 126 were taken from the Île Zembra off the coast.[43]

The enemy was caught before he could effect any major withdrawal even onto the Cap Bon peninsula. He remained, therefore, to be surrounded in the hilly area south and southwest of Grombalia by the enveloping tentacles of British First Army and Eighth Army.

The British 10th Infantry Brigade of the 4th Division on 11 May made the circuit of Cap Bon peninsula along the coastal road, meeting the 12th Brigade of this division along the southeastern side near Menzel el Heurr, while the 26th Armored Brigade and one battalion of the 1st Guards Brigade pressed through all opposition to take Bou Ficha at 1800. At that point, about twelve miles north of Enfidaville, a strong antitank screen stopped the progress of the tanks, on many of which the infantry hitherto had been taken boldly up to any opposition encountered. At nightfall on 11 May, the British 4th Division controlled the peninsula while the 6th Armoured Division held the road from Hammamet to Bou Ficha. At the same time, General Boissau's Oran Division had driven well north of Zarhouan and General Mathenet had received the surrender of *Kampfgruppe Pfeiffer*'s 10,000 men of the *German Africa Corps* with all equipment.[44] Southeast of Zarhouan, in the hills between that town and Enfidaville, the *First Italian Army* held out, its *XXI* and *XX Corps* and the troops of its remaining units interspersed among the Germans of the *90th* and *164th Light Africa Divisions* and the *21st Panzer Division*. General Graf von Sponeck, commanding the *90th Light Africa Division*, declined an invitation from the 2d New Zealand Division to surrender until his resources were exhausted.[45]

The collapse in the south on 12 May was all but complete at nightfall. In front of

[43] (1) Proposals to evacuate specialists were made by the Chief of the Army Personnel Office, General Schmundt, to Jodl on 20 April, and by the German Admiral Commanding in Italy to Kesselring on 14 April. Both proposals were rejected. When Schmundt renewed his proposal on 7 May it was accepted, but too late for important results. *OKH, Chef des Heerespersonalamtes, TB, 1.X.42–12.X.44*, 20 Apr, 7 May 43; *Befehlshaber Deutsches Marine-Kommando Italien, KTB, 1.–30.IV.43*, 14 Apr 43. (2) 18 A Gp, Sitrep 200, 11 May 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

[44] Colonel Pfeiffer had replaced Colonel Schmundt who had returned to *10th Panzer Division* as artillery commander.

[45] Msg, I/277, 18 A Gp to FREEDOM, 12 May 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

British Eighth Army, the only serious resistance was that encountered by the Free French elements in the center of the army line. All enemy resistance, from Saouf to Zarhouan, in front of the French XIX Corps had ended in capitulation. General von Arnim surrendered towards noon north of Ste. Marie-du-Zit. With Allied troops closing in and surrender imminent, he prepared for the end of his command, sending a final report to the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht,* taking leave of his principal staff officers, and committing to flames by his own hand the command post trailer which Rommel had turned over to him two months earlier.[46] A few hours later, General Graf von Sponeck also surrendered. The prisoners poured into custody. Only the *Trieste* and *164th Light Africa Divisions* remained of the larger enemy units which had not yet succumbed. First and Eighth Armies established contact south of Bou Ficha. Air patrols swept the Cap Bon peninsula in search of groups of the enemy and watched the coast for escaping boats. Allied aircraft bombed enemy positions north of Enfidaville, but the chaotic conditions made air support generally impractical. There could be no bomb line. At the end of the day, the Allies held more prisoners than they could count and far more than had been anticipated. Included among them were most of the principal Axis commanders.[47]

[46] MS # C–098 (von Arnim). He attributes his capture to troops of the Reconnaissance Battalion, 4th Indian Division. A contemporary report credited the 1st Royal Sussex Regiment with that action. Msg, O/321, First Army to FREEDOM, 13 May 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

[47] 18 A Gp, Sitrep 201, 12 May 43; Msg, O/321, First Army to FREEDOM, 13 May 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

The last step in the enemy's capitulation was not taken until the commander of the *First Italian Army* surrendered on 13 May. Through General Mancinelli, Messe arranged to make his surrender to the British Eighth Army rather than to the First Army, the French elements of which had been his direct opponents for the last few days. His troops were ordered to turn themselves over to the nearest Allied unit, to destroy no more matériel, and to furnish plans of any mine fields in their sectors. He himself, after radio communication with the headquarters of General Freyberg, British 10 Corps commander, surrendered in the grade of field marshal, to which he had been promoted that very morning.[48] Thus ended hostilities in Tunisia.

Allied Reorganization

The weeks which followed the enemy's collapse in Tunisia were a period of swift transition to the next Allied overseas invasion. The Allies celebrated their victory but gave much more attention to the near future than to the recent past. Throngs of Axis prisoners of war moved slowly westward toward the ports from which eventually they would be shipped to camps in North America. Columns of Allied units in Tunisia shifted to other parts of Northwest Africa where they began getting ready for their next important missions. Lessons learned in combat in Tunisia were recorded and distilled for the benefit of those yet to be sent against the enemy. Military activities

[48] (1) Msg U–3897, Eighth Army to 18 A Gp *et al.*, 13 May 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 108. (2) DMO Jnl, pp. 18–19. (3) Messe, *Come Finì La Guerra in Africa,* pp. 232–37, gives Mancinelli's account of the surrender at great length.



AERIAL VIEW OF ENEMY PRISONERS NEAR MATEUR, *9 May 1943.*

proceeded in an atmosphere of strong political tension, while the separate elements of the actively belligerent French moved toward a long-postponed political and military unification. From Morocco to Tunisia, Northwest Africa witnessed intense and varied Allied preparations for the next great venture, which would bring Allied forces to the European side of the Mediterranean.

The last week of the fighting had brought about 275,000 prisoners into Allied custody, a flood which all but swamped the victors. The prisoners poured into detention areas in long columns either on foot, riding on miscellaneous vehicles, or even sometimes astride burros. The compounds repeatedly had to be enlarged. Enemy morale was generally good, for if some were stolidly sad or deeply dejected, more were resigned or even cheerful, and all were submissive. They needed guides to the prison compounds more than guards. The Allies had been mistaken in expecting an attempt at mass evacuation. Hitler and Mussolini, intending to hold Tunisia as long as possible, were unwilling to risk the effect on morale which preparations for a withdrawal would inflict. Hitler had refused to permit the evacuation of German military specialists of the types so badly needed at other fronts, and only at

the very end did he authorize withdrawal of a specified list of individuals. The collapse had come with startling suddenness. An attempt at prolonged defense on Cap Bon peninsula had been prevented by the extreme shortage of fuel and ammunition. Indeed, General von Arnim's *Army Group Africa* headquarters there had been able to return from the peninsula eventually to join General Cramer's command post north of Ste. Marie-du-Zit only by the providential discovery of a drum of aviation gasoline among the flotsam on a nearby beach. The shortage made any considerable withdrawal of troops onto the peninsula impossible. All flight by sea in small craft was unorganized and insignificant, and Allied offshore patrols found little to do.[49] Guarding and moving the prisoners became a protracted operation.

General Alexander's headquarters left Tunisia, disbanded at Algiers at the end of 15 May, and became Headquarters, 15th Army Group, in charge of ground force preparations for Sicily.[50] General Anderson's First Army headquarters settled in Carthage, at the edge of the sea some ten miles northeast of Tunis, while on 16 May, General Montgomery withdrew Eighth Army Headquarters to Tripoli, leaving all British troops in Tunisia under Anderson's control. In conformity with First Army orders issued 4 May, Tunisia was divided into four subordinate sectors along the coast, each defended by a garrison of one division. Air defense of northern Tunisia was undertaken by the 242d Group, RAF, with its operational center at Djedeïda airfield. Antiaircraft defense at airdromes and ports was assumed by the British 22d and 52d Antiaircraft Brigades. Internal security became a responsibility of the French, exercised through General Barré's 9,000 troops, mainly by the 4th Zouaves and 15th Senegalese Infantry. The French and the British shared the task of coastal defense.[51]

General Bradley left for Algiers on 13 May with part of his staff for conferences on the Sicilian plans, and then went to a new II Corps headquarters at Relizane in the Oran area. The Eastern Base Section, which held temporary control of an area adjacent to Mateur and Bizerte, soon released that control to First Army, and before long, only the U.S. 34th Infantry Division of the former units of U.S. II Corps remained as a garrison force in northeastern Tunisia. The 1st Armored Division moved all the way across French North Africa to Morocco in the zone of the U.S. Fifth Army. The 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions went as far west as the Oran area. The 3d Infantry Division shifted to eastern Algeria. The 1st and 3d Infantry Divisions, scheduled to make assault landings in Sicily, became involved

[49] (1) MS # P–049 (Warlimont). (2) MS # C–0750 (Kesselring). (3) *Befehlshaber, Deutsches Marine-Kommando Italien, KTB, 1.–30.IV.43,* 14 Apr. 43. (4) *OKH, Chef des Heerespersonalamptes, TB, 1.X.42–12.X.44,* 20 Apr, 7 May 43. (5) Msgs, First Army to FREEDOM, 0223, 4 May, 0376, 17 May 43. AFHQ. CofS Cable Log. (6) Msg, W–817, FREEDOM to AGWAR, 18 May 43. (7) Msg, CofS to President, 11 Jun 43, sub: Msg from Eisenhower concerning German morale in Tunisia. WDCSA 381 Germany (11 Jun 43). (8) MS # C–098 (von Arnim).

[50] (1) Msgs, 18 A Gp to FREEDOM, 0920, 13 May, and No. Q/487, 14 May 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log. (2) Msg 774, AFHQ to 18 A Gp, 13 May 43.

[51] (1) First Army Opn Instruc 42, 4 May 43. DRB AGO. (2) Msg, First Army to AFHQ, 0338, 14 May 43; 18 A Gp Sitrep 203, 2359, 14 May 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log.

in amphibian and mountain training and planning with little opportunity for rest.[52]

British Eighth Army, like U.S. II Corps, had been nominated for a role in the seizure of Sicily, and while its scattered elements prepared for that undertaking, British First Army completed its service by supervising the reorganization of Allied control in Tunisia. The command was to be disbanded, a fact not made known to General Anderson in Tunis until the day of the official celebration of the Tunisian victory.[53]

[52] (1) Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, pp. 102–08. (2) Memo, CinC AF for CG's First and Eighth Armies, 18 May 43, sub: Command of Allied ground forces in Tunisia. (2) Memo, AFHQ G–3 for Comdr Tunisia Ditrict, 22 May 43, sub: Garrison of Tunisia. AFHQ G–3 Ops 58/2.1, Micro Job 10C, Reel 188D. (3) Diary of Maj Gen John P. Lucas, pp. 3, 12, 15. Photostat copy in OCMH.

[53] Butcher, *My Three Years With Eisenhower*, p. 311.

CHAPTER XXXV

Fruits of Victory

French Unification

The Allied victory parade in Tunis took place on 20 May. French administrative ties with General Giraud's government in Algiers had already been re-established by the temporary assignment of General Juin as Resident General. French troops were prominent among the marchers, with the warmest applause going to the Moroccan *goumiers*. On the reviewing stand with Generals Eisenhower and Giraud were Generals Anderson and Juin, Admiral Cunningham, and Air Chief Marshal Tedder. Near by were about fifty other commanders and leading staff officers—American, British, and French. The ceremony was both a celebration of victory and a commemoration of the many whose sacrifices had made it possible.

Ten days after the parade in Tunis, General de Gaulle arrived in Algiers to conclude with Giraud the negotiations through which they had already agreed upon a method of uniting their followers. Preliminary exchanges, largely through the mediation of General Georges Catroux, had cleared the path to organization of a nucleus of what was eventually called the French Committee of National Liberation. The two free and actively belligerent sections of the French nation which had accepted leadership by Giraud and de Gaulle, respectively, were thus to be welded into a single entity. The Anglo-American high command gave direct and close attention to these transactions, since the security of the northwest African base and the contribution of French forces to the projected invasion of continental Europe were involved. De Gaulle came to a French North Africa where political sentiment had changed remarkably since 8 November 1942, and even since Giraud's accession to the position from which Darlan had been so abruptly removed by death. Although Giraud in May 1943, could claim the respectful admiration of thousands, his popularity had by this time somewhat diminished despite the recent victory, while de Gaulle had gained in popularity with the resistance movements of continental France and among part of the French population in Northwest Africa.

The strongest impediment to the merger of the French North and West African administration under Giraud and de Gaulle's French National Committee was the determination of the Gaullists to proscribe or punish Frenchmen who had accepted the authority of Marshal Pétain. This vindictiveness had been shown toward Giraud himself by de Gaulle's entourage during the Casablanca Conference, and toward other men actually engaged in fighting the Germans, by General LeClerc, the distinguished Gaullist officer, when Giraud later met him at Montgomery's Eighth Army command post. The Gaullists seemed to others to be



ALLIED LEADERS IN TUNIS, MAY 1943. *Front, from left: General Eisenhower, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder, Gen. Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander, and Adm. Sir Andrew Browne Cunningham. Back, from left: Mr. Harold Macmillan and Maj. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith. The other two in the group are not identified.*

victimized by their own propaganda, which declared that any connection with Marshal Pétain's government was a disqualification for responsible service against the Axis powers. They had carried it so far that when LeClerc's forces were in proximity to those of Koeltz's XIX Corps, at a time when the latter were in contact with the enemy, LeClerc's men had even engaged in recruiting activities among them. In the victory parade in Tunis, the Gaullists refused to march in a French section with Giraud's troops, preferring, with General Anderson's permission, to march with British units in the Eighth Army. The attitude which such incidents revealed made unification most difficult.[1]

Although Giraud and de Gaulle compromised on other matters successfully, they could not reach a satisfactory understanding over the control of the French armed forces, for which the Allies were supplying

[1] (1) CSTT Jnl, 5 May 43. (2) Msg 9721, AFHQ to 18 A Gp, 6 May 43. AFHQ CofS Cable Log, 38. (3) Memo, G–3 AFHQ for CofS AFHQ, 15 Apr 43, sub: Fighting French formations. AFHQ G–3 Ops 37/4, Micro Job 10C, Reel 157F. (4) Barré, *Tunisie, 1942–1943*, pp. 309–17.

the munitions. De Gaulle proposed to make Giraud the commander in chief only of that part of the French forces actually engaged against the enemy, while reserving for himself, as Commissioner of Defense, full control over the entire French military establishment. Giraud was unwilling to accept so subordinate a role or to subject the French Army which he was reconstructing to the control of men imbued with a spirit such as General LeClerc's. A deadlock ensued which lasted for many weeks, during which pressure on both factions by the Allies, who supported Giraud, contributed to an eventual adjustment. It provided for a complicated and inefficient dual control, and postponed for almost a year de Gaulle's acquisition of complete authority, which he gained by astute and gradual steps. In the interval, the United States, British, and Russian Governments recognized the French Committee of National Liberation as a *de facto* government.[2]

Some "Lessons Learned" by the Army

While the Allied force reorganized for the attack on Sicily, and amid a turmoil of varied activities, U.S. headquarters reviewed the fighting of recent weeks as set forth in operations reports. They extracted from these accounts the tactical lessons which could be transmitted to troops in training.[3] Experience in Tunisia had confirmed the basic principles taught in standard U.S. Army training manuals but it had emphasized certain aspects and revealed certain deficiencies in the application of those principles. It had required actual combat and casualties to make the average American soldier sufficiently wary and determined. Even then, the soldiers not only had to know what to do and how to do it, but also to be under the unremitting control of officers who knew their business.

Of the basic tactical principles, none had been more emphatically upheld than the necessity of seizing key terrain features affording effective observation posts for artillery. Dispositions in depth, deployment of infantry in depth, and the mutual support of all heavy weapons from positions organized in depth were repeatedly shown to be essential, particularly in resisting armored attacks. The prevalence of mountain and hill warfare seemed to call for instruction of all infantry in the basic principles of mountain tactics rather than simply the training of specialized units therein. Among the infantry, scouting and patrolling had to be continuous and aggressive. The campaign revealed serious deficiencies in map reading, in use of the compass and other methods of controlling direction, in movement by stealth, avoidance of ambush, in clarity of plans and instructions, in accuracy of reporting, in daylight reconnaissance to prepare for night patrolling, and in control over the members of a patrol. Infantry near Hill 609 had followed artillery preparations at much too great an interval, allowing the enemy after shelling ceased, to return to his weapons before the American troops closed in. At Djebel Cheniti north of the Garaet Ichkeul, where the infantry followed only 100 yards behind the artillery fire, they caught the enemy still seeking cover or barely recuperating, and took the height without loss. Then they made the

[2] (1) COMNAVNEU, U.S.-French Relations, 1942–44, App. B. OCMH. (2) Giraud, *Un seul but: la victoire,* pp. 133–88. (3) Catroux, *Dans la bataille de Méditerranée; Égypte, Levant, Afrique du Nord, 1940–44.* (4) Vigneras, *Rearming the French.*

[3] Compiled in a WD Manual, Lessons from the Tunisian Campaign, 15 Oct 43.

error of remaining on the crest instead of continuing down the forward slope and digging in, so that enemy shells soon struck and hurt them. In general, infantry needed to "lean against" a barrage but that alone was not enough.[4]

American artillery had been employed with what seemed to the enemy great prodigality and with great effect. Prolonged concentrations of slow fire on enemy positions proved more effective than a heavier mass of fire for a shorter period, what the artillerymen called a "serenade." Time fire with high explosive shell obtained remarkable results. Among the precautions for the future which Tunisian experience seemed to justify was to allow artillery units sufficient time for reconnaissance, after receipt of plans and orders, before going into action from new locations. Night moves to unfamiliar areas in order to support an assaulting force at dawn resulted in inefficient performance by the batteries and on occasion, left them open to capture by enemy attacks while the American assault was being made ready. The artillerymen in Tunisia were gratified by the results of their arrangements for flexible employment although aware of their dependence upon signal troops and upon strict wire and radio discipline.[5]

The armored units were impressed by the fact that they had rarely been employed in a concentrated mass of sufficient strength, and that their tactics could not fulfill the expectation, prevalent in the States, that speedy aggressive thrusts could always be made without incurring disastrous losses. Instead of attacking with such reckless audacity, tanks had to advance steadily and skillfully, as the enemy's did, while utilizing every available means of reconnaissance and covering fire. American armored units had found that attacks in depth on a narrow front, the rear elements exploiting gains by pushing through the leading units, and thus extending the blow forward, were more successful than a simultaneous advance on a broad front. They laid down the formula that three battalions of artillery should support one battalion of tanks in an attack. Moreover, the Tunisian battles had demonstrated that chance of success was greater by taking enough time to prepare an attack thoroughly and to disseminate the plans completely than by hurrying to the offensive in an attempt to get the jump on the enemy. In defense, the armored division was more effective if it was concentrated for timely intervention at a given point rather than dispersed to cover a wide front.

Tanks and regular, as distinguished from armored, infantry found that co-operation worked to their mutual advantage, whether in preparing for a tank penetration through a gap made by the infantry or in furnishing close infantry support during a breakthrough by tanks. Infantry support proved indispensable, especially in consolidating the ground overrun by tanks.

The Tunisian campaign tested various methods of employing the tank destroyer, a mobile 75-mm. antitank gun on either a half-tracked or full-tracked vehicle. Much of the time use of these weapons differed little from that of standard artillery, for they were not committed in battalion strength but were employed in platoons. Experience demonstrated that they could not be used to "hunt tanks," since in a fire fight with tanks they soon succumbed. Their mobility

[4] Rpt, Maj Gen Walton H. Walker to CG AGF, 12 Jun 43, sub: Visit to NATOUSA. OPD 381 Africa.

[5] Col Michael Buckley, Jr., Obsr's Rpt, 26 Jun 43, sub: II Corps artillery 21–26 Apr. 43. AGF 319.1/3 (For. Obs).

was chiefly useful to avoid hostile fire or to get in better firing position. They could reconnoiter for the approach of enemy tank formations and then meet the onslaught with defensive fire from hull-down positions in what constituted a trap for the enemy. Best results came from establishing a base of fire, and giving close support to other tank elements from hull-down positions.

Support of ground operations by Allied aviation during the last phase of the Tunisian campaign took the form of attack on enemy troops and positions in the path of ground attack with much greater frequency than it had earlier. Tunisian experience left the air and ground commanders in disagreement, nonetheless, concerning the proper relationship of air and ground units. Disagreement which focused on the right degree of centralized control over air power actually revolved about the relative importance of air targets. Ground commanders generally sought the kind of air support which General Montgomery had received at El 'Alamein and El Hamma, that is, the use of aviation for neutralizing hostile fires, harassing the enemy, or covering friendly ground movements. Since the Americans could not procure support of that type in northern Tunisia under the system of "requests" (through a channel of several echelons up to the 242d Group, RAF), they urged that specific air units be placed under a ground commander's continuous control. The air commanders could, on the other hand, show that such an arrangement would be wasteful of air power in various ways, and might even cost the ground forces the basic benefit of air superiority. The endless conflict could not be resolved except by a more comprehensive approach to tactics than either ground or air officers were in the habit of employing, and remained to be worked out in subsequent months when Allied air resources were more plentiful.[6]

Some "Lessons Learned" by the Enemy

While American troops derived these and other tactical lessons from their combat experience, the enemy learned what to expect from the Americans. The Germans must have been amazed to find themselves losing at any point on the Tunisian front to men whose motives for fighting seemed, from their interrogation of American prisoners, fantastic. "Most of them came over to earn money, or to have an exciting time, or to see something new, or simply to do as others did, with no thought of any political objective; they are rowdies who cannot stand up under an emergency," Hitler was told. "America will never become the Rome of the future, Rome was a country of peasants," he commented in reply. "[American] farmers are so miserable. I have seen pictures of them. Too pitiful and stunted; something altogether uprooted that wanders around. . . ." [7]

The professional German military men were also struck by the inflexible, methodical fashion in which over-equipped American units adhered to fixed, prearranged plans rather than alertly adjusting their operations to grasp favorable opportunities, and by the heavy dependence of American infantry on numerical and matériel supe-

[6] (1) Col Henry V. Dexter, Obsr's Rpt, 11 Jun 43, sub: Air-ground support in North Africa. AGF 319.1/21 (For. Obs). (2) For subsequent developments in Italy, see Col Kent Roberts Greenfield, Army Ground Forces and the Air-ground Battle Team, Including Light Aviation, AGF Hist Sec, Study 35, 1948, pp. 76–85.

[7] *Stenogr Dienst in FHQ, Lagebesprechung vom May 3 1943* (Fragment No. 39), p. 23 (Conv of Hitler, Jodl, and Hewel).

riority. Basing their opinion on the performance of the U.S. II Corps at Faïd, Kasserine, Fondouk el Aouareb, and Gafsa, the Germans felt that the American command clung too rigidly to the practice of forming combat commands and armored task forces which, in the German estimate, resulted in scrambling and inability to achieve a concentration of their forces where tactical success called for it. The Germans noted that the American soldiers fought more courageously in units than as individual fighters. American artillery had not shown its full capabilities and effectiveness despite extraordinarily high expenditure of ammunition. Benefiting from British experience and applying British principles, the Americans had achieved more effective air-ground cooperation. The Germans had learned to respect the clever and efficient manner in which American troops organized for defense. The German High Command concluded that, despite defects in combat leadership and lack of experience in organization, training, and operations, the Americans were quick to learn and their performance in future operations would show marked improvement.[8]

The enemy had studied the amphibious landings of November 1942. Kesselring felt that the relatively weak nature of the defense made them resemble a mere peacetime maneuver. He assumed, moreover, that the Allied capture of Northwest Africa would be a prelude to further operations which would give the Germans and Italians a second chance to oppose the Allies in an attempted beach landing. After the fall of Tunis, Kesselring believed that the prediction of the Allies for air cover in November furnished an important clue to the next point of attack. He concluded that the right mode of defense would be to assemble assault reserves in positions for early counterattack against the Allied beachheads. The landings could not well be prevented but the beachheads would be weak and vulnerable to a concentrated counterattacking force.[9]

Allied Leadership

The Tunisian campaign not only produced seasoned troops and revealed lessons in tactics, but it also tested and developed officers capable of performing well the functions of staff and command in combat conditions. Hundreds of company and battalion officers were sifted by situations in which they showed what they could give and how much they could take. Regimental and division officers were winnowed by the same process. The extraordinary progress which General Bradley's fighting divisions had made by the time the fighting ended was demonstrated in Sicily and Italy. A substantial number of officers later looked back to Tunisia as a point of departure from which they rose to higher command. One group soon returned to the United States to assume key positions in the Army's program of expansion and training, and to take command of new units which eventually fought in Europe or in the Pacific. Others remained in the theater to participate in the seizure of Sicily or the occupation of southern Italy, before shifting to the European Theater or driving up the spine of Italy to the Po valley.[10]

[8] Rpt, Evaluation of American Command and Troops in North Africa, 18 May 43, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt (II), Afrika–A I Berichte-Bd. 3, 16.I.–18.V.43.*

[9] MS # T–3–P II (Kesselring), Pt. II.

[10] Msgs, FREEDOM to AGWAR, No. W–570, 15 May, No. W–739, 17 May 43.

The end of the fighting in Tunisia found General Eisenhower's integrated international staff at Allied Force Headquarters in Algiers a successful going concern ready for what the future might bring. Anglo-American co-operation had survived some hard tests during the preceding months. If the coalition, with the disappointments, frustrations, and recriminations inherent in such a union, could survive the initial and struggling phases, it seemed certain to remain effective as the war in the Mediterranean proceeded, and as the staff sections and commanders utilized the knowledge gained in the preceding months.

Strategic Consequences

Any survey of the gains and losses from the operations in Northwest Africa requires comparison of what had been achieved with what had been anticipated in July 1942 when the Prime Minister and the President decided to send Allied forces there. (*Table 5*) General Eisenhower had been directed to gain, in conjunction with Allied forces in the Middle East, complete control of North Africa from the Atlantic to the Red Sea. From lodgments on the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts of French North Africa, he was expected to extend control over

TABLE 5—BATTLE CASUALTIES SUSTAINED BY THE ALLIED FORCES IN THE TUNISIAN CAMPAIGN: 12 NOVEMBER 1942–13 MAY 1943

Organization	Total	Killed	Wounded	Missing
Total	70,341	10,290	38,688	21,363
U. S. Forces	[a] 18,221	2,715	8,978	6,528
1st Infantry Division	3,916	634	2,585	697
3rd Infantry Division	38	5	33	0
9th Infantry Division	2,724	411	1,825	488
34th Infantry Division	4,049	444	1,539	2,066
1st Armored Division	3,407	547	1,633	1,227
2nd Armored Division	41	11	25	5
Army and Corps Troops	2,046	259	915	872
Twelfth Air Force	2,000	404	423	1,173
British Forces [b]	35,940	6,475	21,630	7,835
First Army	23,545	4,439	12,575	6,531
Eighth Army [c]	12,395	2,036	9,055	1,304
French Forces	16,180	1,100	8,080	7,000

[a] These preliminary data (April 1945) differ somewhat from Final Report of Battle Casualties of World War II (TAG, June 1953). The final report, totaling 2,390 killed in action, 8,577 wounded, and 3,017 captured or missing, however, does not show distribution by division.

[b] Figures shown are for the period 8 November 1942–11 May 1943, which may include a few casualties suffered by the British First Army in initial landings in Algeria.

[c] Includes data for British Dominion troops serving with the Eighth Army.

Source: U. S. Army data (including Air Force) are from Battle Casualties of the Army (preliminary), 1 April 1945, prepared by Machine Records Branch, AGO. British data were supplied by the British Cabinet Office, Historical Section. French data are from the Office of the Military Attaché, Paris, France, Intelligence Report of French Army Casualties During World War II (1942-1945), 27 June 1946, which cites as primary source, Informations Militaires, No. 59, 31 May 1946.

the entire area, including Tunisia, and to create conditions favorable for further offensive operations through Libya against the rear of the Axis forces in the Western Desert. The ultimate objective was complete annihilation of the Axis forces in Africa facing the Eighth Army and an intensification of air and sea operations against the Axis on the continent of Europe. Events had not worked out on schedule, but by May 1943 the Allies had obtained all these goals and more. With the southern side of the Sicilian straits in Allied possession, Allied surface vessels could henceforth move with fair security through the central Mediterranean. The Allies now held a threat to the Axis positions in Sicily, Italy, the Balkans, Crete, and the Dodecanese islands. Airfields along the African coast permitted long-range bombing missions deep into the enemy's European fortress, and long-range reconnaissance flights over the Atlantic in the endless warfare against the Axis submarine.

These benefits had been anticipated but there were others. The Allies had destroyed not only the forces opposing Montgomery in the Western Desert but another whole Axis army and an immense amount of matériel. Casualties, for the German elements of *Army Group Africa* alone, totaled 155,000 men. These losses, added to those sustained by the Axis at Stalingrad a few months earlier, left the Axis powers unable to take the initiative henceforth except for local operations. The Axis partnership, moreover, suffered a severe strain. The Italians would have preferred to have the Germans go on the defensive on the Eastern Front in order to concentrate to meet the western threat with overwhelming power. In fact, Mussolini would even have welcomed a separate peace with the Soviet Union. After the disaster in Tunisia, it was only a question of time before Italy would drop out of the war.[11]

Hitler had determined that Tunisia must be held at all costs, but his concern with the military problem seemed fitful and superficial. He apparently recognized after the surrender that the heavy losses could be justified only by an elaborate explanation. It would have had to include his personal decision, made against the urgent representations of the Italians and his own military advisers, that the attempt to take Malta was not to be made, and Malta in Allied hands had doomed to failure his efforts to supply the Axis armies in Africa. To his principal commanders on the Eastern Front he declared early in July 1943 that he had prevented a loss of the war by defending the Tunisian bridgehead. He pointed out that the Italians would otherwise have dropped out, allowing the Allies to march to the Brenner Pass unopposed at a time when the Germans were in no condition to stop them there. His decision had not only saved the war, he insisted, but had cost the Allies dearly and had delayed a "second front" in Europe for six months.[12] Whatever may be said against this explanation, the fact that it was given amounts to acknowledgment that in Africa the Allies had not only won territory of strategic worth but had inflicted such losses on the Axis powers as to weaken their ability, and perhaps to undermine their will, to fight.

The Allies had made a hard choice in

[11] See pp. 260, 363–70 above.

[12] (1) MS # T–3 (Nehring *et al.*), Pt. IIIa. (2) Excerpt from an unsigned memo carried by Rommel, "The Struggle for the African Outpost—The Balance Sheet of the Campaign in North Africa," in Box 371, EAP 21–a–14/7, CRS.

July 1942 between seeking a quick success in French North Africa before winter and building up strength in the United Kingdom until the following spring for an attack across the English Channel. The decision to gamble on occupying French North Africa ahead of the Axis forces led to a failure in December which could not be remedied before May 1943. One may well doubt that this failure alone caused deferment of a cross-Channel attack until 1944, in view of the many other considerations involved. But one important conclusion concerning the relation of the decision to occupy French North Africa to the fundamental Allied strategy seems beyond question. Even if the Allies had succeeded in establishing a bridgehead in Normandy in 1943, their experience in Tunisia demonstrated that they would have been unprepared for breaking out of this bridgehead and thrusting far toward the heart of Nazi Germany. This experience they gained by meeting the enemy at the outer periphery of the area to be liberated at a time when the Eastern Front continued to absorb the bulk of Axis military power. The triumph of Allied arms in Tunisia was achieved under conditions which taught them the way to win battles together, to meet and to recover from reverses, and to push on aggressively to the far harder struggle for final victory. For the U.S. Army, the operations in Northwest Africa were of inestimable value in making it a far more efficient fighting force. At their conclusion, the Axis alliance had become seriously weaker and the Allied coalition far stronger than when they began. On the road to complete military victory in Europe, the Allies had made an auspicious start.

Appendix A

Allied Troop and Supply Shipments

TABLE 6—STRENGTH AND SUPPLIES OF ALLIED ASSAULT FORCES IN THE INVASION OF NORTH AFRICA: 8 NOVEMBER 1942

Task Force	Number of Ships	Number of Troops	Number of Vehicles	Supplies (Long Tons)		
				Total	Vehicles	Other
Total	107	107,453	9,911	96,089	40,406	55,683
Western	30	[a] 33,843	2,953	41,262	10,344	30,918
Center	44	40,800	2,843	27,536	[b] 14,935	12,601
Eastern	33	32,810	4,115	27,291	15,127	12,164

[a] The number of U.S. troops in convoy UGF-1 was originally reported as 40,397, but this figure was later revised (see ASF MPR-3, May 31, 1943, p. 85).

[b] Estimated.

Source: Office of the Chief of Transportation; Services of Supply, War Department, Monthly Progress Report, Transportation, Section 3, January 31, 1943, p. 38.

TABLE 7—STRENGTH OF ALLIED FORCES LANDED IN NORTH AFRICA AS OF 1 DECEMBER 1942

Nationality and Task Force	Total	Convoy Arrivals				
		KM-1 (8 Nov)	KM-2 (11 Nov)	KM-3 (21 Nov-23 Nov)	UG-1 (8 Nov)	UG-2 (18 Nov-1 Dec)
All Troops	253,213	73,610	51,150	62,820	33,843	31,790
Eastern	112,860	32,810	30,270	49,780	0	0
Center	74,720	40,800	20,880	13,040	0	0
Western	65,633	0	0	0	33,843	31,790
U. S. Troops	146,453	46,920	20,860	13,040	33,843	31,790
Eastern	10,020	9,860	160	0	0	0
Center	70,800	37,060	20,700	13,040	0	0
Western	65,633	0	0	0	33,843	31,790
British Troops	106,760	26,690	30,290	49,780	0	0
Eastern	102,840	22,950	30,110	49,780	0	0
Center	3,920	3,740	180	0	0	0
Western	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: KM Convoys, AFHQ, Shipping Allocation Meeting No. 7, 18 November 1942, 0100/21 AFHQ AG 337, Conferences, II, Reel 24, 79-D, Serial 276. UG Convoys, ASF Monthly Progress Report, Section 3, Transportation, 31 May 1943.

TABLE 8—STRENGTH OF U.S. ARMY IN NORTH AFRICA: NOVEMBER 1942–APRIL 1943

Organization	30 November 1942			31 December 1942			31 January 1943		
	Total	Officers	Enlisted	Total	Officers	Enlisted	Total	Officers	Enlisted
Total	128, 567	7, 528	121, 039	227, 099	14, 467	212, 632	260, 771	17, 214	243, 557
Headquarters	559	116	443	789	181	608	1, 393	301	1, 092
Air Force	23, 259	1, 552	21, 707	42, 906	2, 912	39, 994	49, 967	3, 528	46, 439
Divisional	52, 519	2, 608	49, 911	90, 103	4, 805	85, 298	86, 255	4, 513	81, 742
1st Infantry	14, 883	716	14, 167	16, 682	808	15, 874	16, 274	810	15, 464
3rd Infantry	12, 590	721	11, 869	15, 106	808	14, 298	15, 784	858	14, 926
9th Infantry	11, 917	548	11, 369	14, 066	696	13, 370	14, 433	746	13, 687
34th Infantry	5, 107	218	4, 889	13, 676	753	12, 923	14, 087	744	13, 343
36th Infantry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1st Armored	3, 979	195	3, 784	15, 800	852	14, 948	10, 158	546	9, 612
2nd Armored	4, 043	210	3, 833	14, 773	888	13, 885	15, 519	809	14, 710
82nd Airborne	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nondivisional	50, 977	2, 904	48, 073	86, 590	5, 456	81, 134	113, 834	7, 134	106, 700
Combat Arms	4, 374	478	3, 896	14, 360	1, 209	13, 151	21, 652	1, 608	20, 044
Technical Services	46, 603	2, 426	44, 177	72, 230	4, 247	67, 983	92, 182	5, 526	86, 656
Adjutant General	34	9	25	1, 365	84	1, 281	6, 003	324	5, 679
Chemical Warfare	108	6	102	473	18	455	847	33	814
Engineer Corps	17, 086	712	16, 374	21, 154	879	20, 275	25, 444	1, 089	24, 355
Medical Corps	2, 938	615	2, 323	9, 313	1, 745	7, 568	12, 139	2, 169	9, 970
Military Police	231	8	223	1, 127	29	1, 098	1, 600	56	1, 544
Ordnance	7, 486	286	7, 200	10, 757	446	10, 311	13, 368	566	12, 802
Quartermaster	6, 727	216	6, 511	10, 219	342	9, 877	10, 896	366	10, 530
Signal	7, 248	335	6, 913	13, 144	532	12, 612	15, 686	640	15, 046
Transportation	4, 745	239	4, 506	4, 678	172	4, 506	6, 199	283	5, 916
Miscellaneous	1, 253	348	905	6, 711	1, 113	5, 598	9, 322	1, 738	7, 584

Organization	28 February 1943			31 March 1943 *			30 April 1943 *		
	Total	Officers	Enlisted	Total	Officers	Enlisted	Total	Officers	Enlisted
Total	298,545	21,186	277,359	344,488	25,173	319,315	395,461	29,299	366,162
Headquarters	2,292	463	1,829	1,598	408	1,190	1,653	413	1,240
Air Force	63,705	6,148	57,557	75,919	7,590	68,329	81,169	8,220	72,949
Divisional	87,952	4,739	83,213	89,345	4,720	84,625	106,110	5,462	100,648
1st Infantry	16,214	800	15,414	17,080	815	16,265	16,412	786	15,626
3rd Infantry	13,798	804	12,994	13,478	764	12,714	14,895	757	14,138
9th Infantry	14,609	745	13,864	15,409	768	14,641	15,155	775	14,380
34th Infantry	13,978	761	13,217	14,091	742	13,349	13,917	728	13,189
36th Infantry	0	0	0	0	0	0	15,626	757	14,869
1st Armored	14,910	866	14,044	14,807	846	13,961	15,504	875	14,629
2nd Armored	14,443	763	13,680	14,480	785	13,695	14,549	772	13,777
82nd Airborne	0	0	0	0	0	0	52	12	40
Nondivisional	131,718	7,904	123,814	160,722	9,757	150,965	172,723	10,787	161,936
Combat Arms	23,194	1,173	22,021	22,426	1,169	21,257	24,738	1,288	23,450
Technical Services	108,524	6,731	101,793	138,296	8,588	129,708	147,985	9,499	138,486
Adjutant General	820	86	734	8,695	691	8,004	1,310	76	1,234
Chemical Warfare	1,038	37	1,001	1,166	41	1,125	1,175	42	1,133
Engineer Corps	32,305	1,386	30,919	32,711	1,439	31,272	39,549	1,693	37,856
Medical Corps	14,094	2,668	11,426	17,777	3,137	14,640	21,928	3,989	17,939
Military Police	2,229	80	2,149	3,425	134	3,291	4,882	173	4,709
Ordnance	14,933	635	14,298	17,642	784	16,858	18,318	857	17,461
Quartermaster	14,783	553	14,230	22,638	812	21,826	27,567	1,051	26,516
Signal	17,244	805	16,439	21,335	978	20,357	20,382	1,012	19,370
Transportation	11,078	481	10,597	12,907	572	12,335	12,874	606	12,268
Miscellaneous	12,878	1,932	10,946	16,904	2,698	14,206	33,806	4,417	29,389

* Includes troops, not identifiable except in the case of the 36th Infantry and 82nd Airborne Divisions, sent to North Africa in March 1943 and subsequent months in preparation for the invasion of Sicily.

Source: Strength of Bases by Organization, Report SFM 10, compiled monthly by Machine Records Branch, AGO.

Appendix B

Axis Troop and Supply Shipments

TABLE 9—GERMAN SUPPLY SHIPMENTS RECEIVED IN NORTH AFRICA: NOVEMBER 1942–MAY 1943

Destination and Type	Total	1942		1943				
		Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Total Tonnage	188, 517	36, 062	28, 206	36, 326	32, 966	29, 267	23, 017	2, 673
Air Transport (Tons)	31, 386	3, 688	5, 593	4, 664	4, 953	7, 651	4, 327	510
Sea Transport (Tons)*	157, 131	32, 374	22, 613	31, 662	28, 013	21, 616	18, 690	2, 163
Tons of Ammunition	47, 789	7, 899	8, 085	7, 073	8, 775	7, 619	6, 842	1, 496
Tons of POL	66, 652	16, 003	9, 332	17, 511	7, 978	7, 322	8, 128	378
Tons of Other Supplies	42, 690	8, 472	5, 196	7, 078	11, 260	6, 675	3, 720	289
Number of Tanks	544	187	191	50	52	20	44	0
Number of Vehicles	8, 173	1, 493	2, 178	2, 017	1, 483	711	277	14
Number of Guns	1, 093	230	250	249	157	153	47	7
TUNISIA								
Total Tonnage	161, 576	13, 208	24, 940	35, 505	32, 966	29, 267	23, 017	2, 673
Air Transport (Tons)	25, 572	581	3, 503	4, 047	4, 953	7, 651	4, 327	510
Sea Transport (Tons)*	136, 004	12, 627	21, 437	31, 458	28, 013	21, 616	18, 690	2, 163
Tons of Ammunition	43, 376	4, 136	7, 504	7, 004	8, 775	7, 619	6, 842	1, 496
Tons of POL	55, 576	5, 285	9, 109	17, 376	7, 978	7, 322	8, 128	378
Tons of Other Supplies	37, 052	3, 206	4, 824	7, 078	11, 260	6, 675	3, 720	289
Number of Tanks	495	149	180	50	52	20	44	0
Number of Vehicles	7, 692	1, 079	2, 111	2, 017	1, 483	711	277	14
Number of Guns	975	127	235	249	157	153	47	7
LIBYA								
Total Tonnage	26, 941	22, 854	3, 266	821	0	0	0	0
Air Transport (Tons)	5, 814	3, 107	2, 090	617	0	0	0	0
Sea Transport (Tons)*	21, 127	19, 747	1, 176	204	0	0	0	0
Tons of Ammunition	4, 413	3, 763	581	69	0	0	0	0
Tons of POL	11, 076	10, 718	223	135	0	0	0	0
Tons of Other Supplies	5, 638	5, 266	372	0	0	0	0	0
Number of Tanks	49	38	11	0	0	0	0	0
Number of Vehicles	481	414	67	0	0	0	0	0
Number of Guns	118	103	15	0	0	0	0	0

* Does not include tonnage of the number of tanks, vehicles, and guns.

Source: Tables and Rpts in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt (II), A IV—Afrika—Transporte—Allgemain, 10.XII.42—1.VI.43.*

TABLE 10—GERMAN LOSSES IN SEA TRANSPORT TO NORTH AFRICA, NOVEMBER 1942–MAY 1943

Ships and Type of Supply	Total	1942		1943				
		Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Number of ships:								
Lost	168	13	26	21	29	26	29	24
Damaged	18	0	9	3	1	2	2	1
Tons of Supplies	81,520	10,404	17,840	7,605	11,874	11,338	15,516	6,943
Number of Tanks	79	9	54	10	0	0	3	3
Number of Guns	320	37	111	41	25	60	17	29
Number of Vehicles	2,546	74	964	545	212	482	211	58

Source: Tables and Rpts, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt (II), A IV—Afrika—Transporte—Allgemein, 10.XII.42—1.VII.43.*

TABLE 11—AXIS TROOPS TRANSPORTED TO NORTH AFRICA: NOVEMBER 1942–MAY 1943

Destination and Nationality	Total	1942		1943				
		Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Total [a]	[a]172,782	32,022	38,549	41,386	[a]29,233	[a]20,135	[a]11,142	[a]315
German	142,047	20,975	30,773	29,474	29,233	20,135	11,142	315
Italian [a]	[a]30,735	11,047	7,776	11,912	(a)	(a)	(a)	(a)
TUNISIA—Total [a]	[a]167,884	28,187	37,757	41,115	[a]29,233	[a]20,135	[a]11,142	[a]315
German	137,149	17,140	29,981	29,203	29,233	20,135	[b]11,142	315
By Air	81,021	15,273	18,162	14,257	12,893	11,756	[b]8,388	292
By Sea	56,128	1,867	11,819	14,946	16,340	8,379	[b]2,754	23
Italian [a]	[a]30,735	11,047	7,776	11,912	(a)	(a)	(a)	(a)
LYBIA—Total [a]	[a]4,898	[a]3,835	[a]792	[a]271	0	0	0	0
German	4,898	3,835	792	271	0	0	0	0
By Air	4,319	3,323	730	266	0	0	0	0
By Sea	579	512	62	5	0	0	0	0
Italian	(a)	(a)	(a)	(a)	0	0	0	0

[a] Excludes unknown number of Italians transported to Libya in November 1942 through January 1943, and to Tunisia in February through May 1943.

[b] Data from Rpts, *Afrika Transporte*, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt (II), Afrika—A II Kraefte, 1. I–28.V. 43.* This source and the one cited in source note below contain irreconcilable differences which may have resulted from hasty compilation and typographical errors carried over from *OB SOUTH* reports into the *OKH/GenStdH* tables. Careful evaluation of all available documents makes it reasonably certain that the figures given for April are the correct ones.

Source: German troops in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt (II), A IV—Afrika—Transporte—Allgemein, 10.XII.42–1.VII.43.* Italian troops to Tunisia in Rpts, *German General at the Headquarters, Italian Armed Forces*, in *OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt (II), Tunis, 10.XI.42–2.V.43.*

Note on Sources

Sources for this history are now held in six principal repositories: (1) Departmental Records Branch, The Adjutant General's Office (DRB TAGO), Alexandria, Va.; (2) Military Personnel Records Center, The Adjutant General's Office, St. Louis, Missouri; (3) Kansas City Records Center, Kansas City, Missouri; (4) Division of Naval History, Washington, D. C.; (5) Archives Branch, U.S. Air Force Historical Division, Director, Research Institute, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama; and (6) Office of the Chief of Military History (OCMH), Department of the Army, Washington, D. C.

The most important single collection of records in the preparation of this volume has been the AFHQ records. This consists of reports, messages, correspondence, planning papers, and sundry other material on all phases of Operation TORCH and the subsequent campaign in Tunisia. The sprawling body of this collection is in the United Kingdom, but microfilm copies of all these records are located in DRB TAGO. Some of these microfilm copies have been photo-enlarged and arranged in file folders. Both the microfilm and the photo-enlarged documents are organized by job and reel number, as well as by a topical or chronological classification. Use of these records is greatly facilitated by two unpublished bibliographical guides: (1) Kenneth W. Munden, Analytical Guide to the Combined British-American Records of the Mediterranean Theater of Operations in World War II, prepared in 1948; and (2) the three-volume Catalogue of Combined British-American Records of the Mediterranean Theater of Operations in World War II, a more complete listing of these records. Both of these guides are located in DRB TAGO.

Two collections subsidiary to this larger one are the AFHQ Chief of Staff Cable Log and the Smith Papers. The former is located in DRB TAGO and contains an abstract of all incoming AFHQ messages. It was for the use of the Chief of Staff, Deputy Commander in Chief, and Commander in Chief, Allied Force. The complete copies of these documents are in the AFHQ records. The Smith Papers are now at the Army War College Library, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.

Much reliance has been placed upon contemporary messages, correspondence, and papers. Although these have not been found in any one single collection, the Operations Division (OPD) records are of the utmost importance for high-level decisions and planning. These are divided into several subdivisions of which the following were used: (1) the official central correspondence files of OPD; (2) Executive Group file (OPD Exec), which contains messages exchanged between President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill as well as other high-level papers; (3) the Strategy and Policy Group file (OPD ABC). All of these files are in the custody of DRB TAGO. (4) Microfilm copies of the War Department Message Center file which contains all official incoming (CM-IN) and outgoing (CM-OUT) messages sent to and from Washington during the war are in the custody of the Staff Communications Office of the Office of the Chief of Staff.

Other files and documents which are of importance for the planning, strategy, and high policy are the following:

ETOUSA Incoming and Outgoing Cables, Kansas City Records Center.

CinC Allied Force Diary, in General Eisenhower's custody when consulted. A diary kept for General Eisenhower which contains messages, papers, and other materials.

NAF–FAN messages. These are the messages between CinC Allied Force and the Combined Chiefs of Staff. They may be found in several locations, one of which is AFHQ Microfilm, Supreme Allied Commander's Secretariat. They are listed with other messages to and from the AFHQ Message Center.

Patton Diary. This was in private possession when consulted.

WDCSA file, DRB AGO. This includes correspondence and papers of the Office of the Chief of Staff, Army.

CCS and JCS minutes and papers. Copies are in the custody of DRB TAGO.

The basic sources for the landings in North Africa are the task force reports. The Western Task Force (WTF) Final Report, which is located in DRB TAGO, covers the landings on the Atlantic coast. The Report of Proceedings, Operation TORCH, by the Naval Commander in Chief (NCXF, TORCH Despatch), contains the reports of the Center Task Force (CTF) and the Eastern Assault Force (EAF). TORCH Despatch is part of the AFHQ microfilm collection. These documents are supplemented by various naval reports—action reports and war diaries of U.S. warships as well as other records—which are located in the Division of Naval History, and by the reports and other official records of the U.S. Army units involved.

The story of the ground action was constructed primarily from the reports of the U.S. Army units, which are filed according to the organizational units where they originated, such as II Corps, etc. These documents consist of after action reports (AAR's) histories, journals, war diaries, field orders (FO's), general orders (GO's), situation reports (sitreps), combined intelligence and situation reports (cosintreps), and operations instructions (opn instrucs). They are located in DRB TAGO. The information obtained from these official reports was supplemented by selected monographs prepared at The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia, and at The Armored School, Fort Knox, Kentucky, as well as by diaries and memoirs of other participants.

The records of the British units have not been systematically and completely assembled in the United States in any one collection. Many are scattered among the records of AFHQ or of the American units directly involved. In a few instances photostat copies are held by DRB TAGO. Details concerning the activities of British Army forces were for the most part extracted from an unpublished narrative of the Campaign in Tunisia which was prepared by the Historical Section, Cabinet Office, London, or were furnished in response to specific inquiries.

For the activities of the Allied air forces in North Africa, the work of Thomas J. Mayock in Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol. II, *Europe—TORCH to POINTBLANK* (Chicago, 1949), is indispensable. Historical reports of the Army Air Force are located in the Archives Branch, Research Studies Institute, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. Other records are scattered throughout the

AFHQ collection. Data concerning the Royal Air Force came chiefly from an operational narrative and statistics which were provided by the Air Historical Branch, Air Ministry, London.

The information in the official records has been amplified, clarified, and interpreted in the light of the author's interviews and correspondence with participants, now filed in OCMH. Such evidence depends fundamentally on memory from five to eight years after the events.

Material dealing with relations with the French have come from many sources. The files of the Liaison Section, AFHQ, and of the Joint Rearmament Committee, AFHQ, are in the AFHQ microfilm collection. Also of importance are Haute Cour de Justice, *Le Proces du Maréchal Pétain* (Paris, 1945), and a documentary appendix for an unpublished report by the U.S. Naval Commander, Europe (Admiral Harold R. Stark), which is entitled U.S.–French Relations, 1942–1944. A copy of the latter is held by OCMH.

Certain combat records of French units operating in Tunisia were photo-copied for the files of OCMH by Mr. Marcel Vigneras with the co-operation of the *Service Historique de l'Armée,* the *Ministère de la Guerre,* and others in French Army. These consist of the *Journaux de marche* of the French divisions and armored brigade in Tunisia, of the *Commandement supérieur des troupes de Tunisie,* and of the XIX Army Corps, and the report written in General Giraud's headquarters after the liberation of French North Africa. The account of German planning and operations is based on original records of the German Army and on a series of interrogation reports and monographs written by German officers after the war.

Included among original records are war diaries (*KTB*'s) and their supporting papers—special orders, reports, telegrams, and conference minutes—of army, corps, and division headquarters. These documents are in the Captured Records Section of the Departmental Records Branch, Alexandria, Virginia. German naval, air force, and diplomatic records were also used to some extent.

The interrogation reports and monographs were prepared under the direction of the Historical Division, USAREUR, by German officers relying at first on unaided memory, and later, on memory supported by copies of pertinent records, and by discussion with other participants. The Foreign Studies Branch, OCMH, has custody of such writings. They are mainly concerned with matters of strategy, logistics, and command and are supplemented by a series of briefer essays on a wide range of topics, including the tactical history of certain task forces in Tunisia. The author used these memoirs in manuscript form; subsequently some of the writers published the substance in books which appeared too late for consultation.

Contemporary archives relating to Italian forces in Northwest Africa are confined to those arising from Italy's association with Germany in the Axis partnership, and to German-Italian military-diplomatic relations. Some of Mussolini's papers have survived, either in the records of AFHQ or elsewhere, and Italian policy is recorded in a special group of Count Ciano's Papers which fell into German hands and were translated into German, the form in which they were recovered at the end of the war. Copies of these papers are in OCMH. Material on Italian operations was also available in the volumes covering the North

African campaign published by the Ministry of Defense, Army General Staff, Rome, Italy, and from other published postwar narratives. Extracts from the diary of Chief of the Italian Armed Forces Staff (*Comando Supremo*) have been published under the title: Ugo Conte Cavallero, *Comando Supremo* (Rome, 1948).

Secondary sources are listed only in the footnote citations.

Glossary

AAF	Army Air Forces
AAR	After action report
ABC	American-British Conversations
ACofS	Assistant Chief of Staff
Admin	Administration
Adv	Advance
AF	Allied Force
AFCP	Allied Force Command Post
AFHQ	Allied Force Headquarters
AGF	Army Ground Forces
AGWAR	Adjutant General, War Department (Washington)
Amph	Amphibious, amphibian
Anlage	Appendix or annex
Armd	Armored
Arty	Artillery
ASC	Air support command
BAR	Browning automatic rifle
BLT	Battalion landing team
Bn	Battalion
Br.	British
Brig	Brigade or brigadier
CCA, CCB, CCC, CCD	Combat Command A, B, C, and D
CCS	Combined Chiefs of Staff
CG	Commanding general
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CinC	Commander in Chief
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
CO	Commanding officer
Co	Company
Comdr	Commander
Commandement de l'Est Saharien	Eastern Saharan Group
COMNAVEU	Commander U.S. Naval Forces, Europe
Conf	Conference
Conv	Conversation
COS	Chiefs of Staff Committee (British)
Cosintrep	Combined situation and intelligence report
CP	Command post

CRS DRB TAGO	Captured Records Section, Departmental Records Branch, The Adjutant General's Office
CSTT	Commandement Supérieur des Troupes de Tunisie (Tunisian Troop Command)
CT	Combat team
CTF	Center Task Force
CTG	Commander, Task Group
Ctr	Center
D/A	Department of the Army
Dept	Department
Detachement de Couverture	Cover Force
Div	Division
DMC	Division de marche de Constantine (Constantine Division)
Doc	Document
DWStK	*Deutsche Waffen Stillstandkommission* (German Armistice Commission)
EAF	Eastern Assault Force
EAP	Eastern Assault Plan
EBS	Eastern Base Section
Engr	Engineer
Env	Envelope
ETF	Eastern Task Force
ETOUSA	European Theater of Operations, U.S. Army
Exec	Executive
FA	Field Artillery
Fuehrungsgruppe	Operations group
Fuehrungsstab	Operations staff
G–1	Personnel Officer of division or higher staff
G–2	Intelligence
G–3	Plans and operations
G–4	Logistics and supply
GenStdH	*Generalstab des Heeres* (General Staff of the Army)
GO	General order
Gp	Group
Heeresgruppe	Army group
Hist	History or historical
Incl	Inclosure
Inf	Infantry
Info	Information
Instrucs	Instructions
Intell	Intelligence
Interv	Interview

JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
Jnl	Journal
JSM	Joint Staff Mission (British)
Kampfgruppe	German combat group of variable size
Kasta	*Kampfstaffel* (combat detachment)
KTB	*Kriegstagebuch* (war diary)
LCM	Landing craft, mechanized
LCP	Landing craft, personnel
LCP (R)	Landing craft, personnel (ramp)
LCV	Landing craft, vehicle
LST	Landing ship, tank
Lt Comdr	Lieutenant commander
LVT	Landing vehicle, tracked
Maint	Maintenance
Micro	Microfilm
Mil	Military
Min	Minutes
Misc	Miscellaneous
Msg	Message
Mvmt	Movement
NAF	North Africa
NATOUSA	North African Theater of Operations, U.S. Army
NC	Naval commander
NCXF	Naval Commander Expeditionary Force
Ob d H	*Oberbefehlshaber des Heeres* (Commander in Chief of the Army)
OB SUED	*Oberbefehlshaber Sued* (Headquarters, Commander in Chief South [southern Germany and several army groups on the Eastern Front])
OB WEST	*Oberbefehlshaber West* (Headquarters, Commander in Chief West [France, Belgium, and the Netherlands])
Oberkommando	Headquarters of an army or higher military organization
Obsn	Observation
Obsr	Observer
OCT	Office, Chief of Transportation
OKH	*Oberkommando des Heeres* (Army High Command)
OKL	*Oberkommando der Luftwaffe* (Luftwaffe High Command)
OKM	*Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine* (Navy High Command)

OKW	*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (Armed Forces High Command)
Op (H)	*Operations Abteilung (H)* (Operations Branch Army)
Org Abt	*Organizations Abteilung* (staff section in charge of organization)
OPD	Operations and Plans Division
Opn	Operation
Opnl	Operational
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
Par	Paragraph
Prep	Preparation
Plat	Platoon
Rad	Radiogram
RAF	Royal Air Force
Rcd	Record
Rcn	Reconnaissance
RCT	Regimental combat team
Regt	Regiment
Rev	Revised
RLG	Regimental landing group
RN	Royal Navy
RNR	Royal Navy Reserve
Rpt	Report
S–1	Personnel section of a unit not having a general staff
S–2	Military intelligence section of a unit not having a general staff
S–3	Operations and training section of a unit not having a general staff
S–4	Supply and evacuation section of a unit not having a general staff
SCR	Signal Corps radio
SD	*Sicherheitsdienst des Reichfuehrers SS* (The Nazi Party Security Service)
S.I.M.	Italian Army Intelligence
S.I.S.	Italian Naval Intelligence
Sec	Section
Secy	Secretary
Sitrep	Situation report
SNO	Senior Naval Officer
SNOL	Senior Naval Officer Landings
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SOS	Services of Supply

SP	Self-propelled
Spec	Special
Sub	Subject
Sum	Summary
Supp	Supplementary
TAG	The Adjutant General
TD	Tank destroyer
Telg	Telegram
TF	Task force
Tng	Training
Trans	Transportation
Transl	Translation
USFOR	U.S. Forces (London)
USN	U.S. Navy
WDCSA	Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army
WFSt	*Wehrmachtfuehrungsstab* (Armed Forces Operations Staff)
WTF	Western Task Force

Code Names

ANTON	German occupation of southern France, up to this time unoccupied and under the administration of Vichy France, 10–11 November 1942
ARCADIA	U.S.-British staff conference at Washington, December 1941–January 1942
AUSLADUNG	German secondary attack, part of Operation OCHSENKOPF, designed to extend the Tunis bridgehead in the north
BOLERO	Build-up of troops and supplies in the United Kingdom in preparation for a cross-Channel attack
BREASTPLATE	Seaborne attack on Sousse mounted in Malta, planned but not attempted
CAPRI	Plan for attack against Médenine
EILBOTE	German operation to capture the Kebir river dam and drive the French off the Eastern Dorsal, January 1943
FELIX	Plan to capture Gibraltar and close the straits
FLAX	Program to choke off the air supply line from Italy
FRUEHLINGSWIND	German (*Fifth Panzer Army*) attack against Sidi Bou Zid, February 1943
GYMNAST	Plan of 1941 for invasion of French North Africa
HERKULES	Planned German operation to capture Malta in 1942
HUSKY	Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943
MINERVA	Embarkation of Gen. Henri Giraud from southern France, 6 November 1942
MORGENLUFT	German (*Africa Corps*) attack against Gafsa, after Operation *FRUEHLINGSWIND*, February 1943
OCHSENKOPF	German operation to extend the Tunis bridgehead by capturing Bédja and Medjez el Bab, 26 February 1943
OLIVENERNTE	German planned operation to capture Medjez el Bab in January 1943. Not executed.
PERPETUAL	Eastern Task Force reserve landing at Bougie, 11 November 1942
POINTBLANK	The Combined Bomber Offensive from the United Kingdom against Germany

PUGILIST-GALLOP	Offensive to outflank Mareth Line
RESERVIST	Seizure of vital points at Oran and landing of Allied forces to prevent sabotage in the harbor
RETRIBUTION	Plan to prevent any of the enemy from reaching Italian territory if they should attempt to evacuate Tunisia (April–June 1943)
ROOFTREE	Joint Army-Navy Plan for Participation in TORCH
ROUNDUP	Various 1941–43 plans for a cross-Channel attack
SATIN	Allied attack toward Sfax, December 1942. Not executed.
SCIPIO	Eighth Army attack at the Akarit wadi, 6 April 1942
SEA LION (SEELOEWE)	The German planned invasion of England in 1940–41
SLEDGEHAMMER	Plan for a limited-objective attack across the Channel in 1942 designed either to take advantage of a crack in German morale or as a "sacrifice" operation to aid the Russians
STURMFLUT	German (Rommel's) operation against Kasserine Pass and Sbiba gap, 19–22 February 1943
SUPERCHARGE	Operations by the Eighth Army in the Western Desert in November 1942
SUPER-GYMNAST	Plan for Anglo-American invasion of French North Africa, combining U.S. and British plans and often used interchangeably with GYMNAST
SYMBOL	Casablanca Conference, 14–23 January 1943
TERMINAL	Operation in harbor of Algiers, 8 November 1942
THESEUS	Planned German operation for Libya, 1942
TORCH	The Allied invasion operation in North Africa, November 1942
WOP	Opening attack by II Corps against Gafsa, 17 March 1943

Basic Military Map Symbols*

Symbols within a rectangle indicate a military unit, within a triangle an observation post, and within a circle a supply point.

Military Units—Identification

Antiaircraft Artillery 

Armored Command 

Army Air Forces 

Artillery, except Antiaircraft and Coast Artillery 

Cavalry, Horse 

Cavalry, Mechanized 

Chemical Warfare Service 

Coast Artillery 

Engineers 

Infantry 

Medical Corps 

Ordnance Department 

Quartermaster Corps 

Signal Corps 

Tank Destroyer 

Transportation Corps 

Veterinary Corps 

Airborne units are designated by combining a gull wing symbol with the arm or service symbol:

Airborne Artillery 

Airborne Infantry 

*For complete listing of symbols in use during the World War II period, see FM 21-30, dated October 1943, from which these are taken.

Size Symbols

The following symbols placed either in boundary lines or above the rectangle, triangle, or circle inclosing the identifying arm or service symbol indicate the size of military organization:

Squad	•
Section	••
Platoon	•••
Company, troop, battery, Air Force flight	I
Battalion, cavalry squadron, or Air Force squadron	II
Regiment or group; combat team (with abbreviation CT following identifying numeral)	III
Brigade, Combat Command of Armored Division, or Air Force Wing	X
Division or Command of an Air Force	XX
Corps or Air Force	XXX
Army	XXXX
Group of Armies	XXXXX

EXAMPLES

The letter or number to the left of the symbol indicates the unit designation; that to the right, the designation of the parent unit to which it belongs. Letters or numbers above or below boundary lines designate the units separated by the lines:

Company A, 137th Infantry	A 137
8th Field Artillery Battalion	8
Combat Command A, 1st Armored Division	A I
Observation Post, 23d Infantry	23
Command Post, 5th Infantry Division	5
Boundary between 137th and 138th Infantry	137 / III / 138

Weapons

Machine gun	
Gun	
Gun battery	
Howitzer or Mortar	
Tank	
Self-propelled gun	

UNITED STATES ARMY IN WORLD WAR II

The following volumes have been published or are in press:

The War Department
- *Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations*
- *Washington Command Post: The Operations Division*
- *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare: 1941–1942*
- *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare: 1943–1944*
- *Global Logistics and Strategy: 1940–1943*
- *Global Logistics and Strategy: 1943–1945*
- *The Army and Economic Mobilization*
- *The Army and Industrial Manpower*

The Army Ground Forces
- *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops*
- *The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops*

The Army Service Forces
- *The Organization and Role of the Army Service Forces*

The Western Hemisphere
- *The Framework of Hemisphere Defense*
- *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*

The War in the Pacific
- *The Fall of the Philippines*
- *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*
- *Victory in Papua*
- *CARTWHEEL: The Reduction of Rabaul*
- *Seizure of the Gilberts and Marshalls*
- *Campaign in the Marianas*
- *The Approach to the Philippines*
- *Leyte: The Return to the Philippines*
- *Triumph in the Philippines*
- *Okinawa: The Last Battle*
- *Strategy and Command: The First Two Years*

The Mediterranean Theater of Operations
- *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*
- *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*
- *Salerno to Cassino*
- *Cassino to the Alps*

The European Theater of Operations
- *Cross-Channel Attack*
- *Breakout and Pursuit*
- *The Lorraine Campaign*
- *The Siegfried Line Campaign*
- *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*
- *The Last Offensive*
- *The Supreme Command*

Logistical Support of the Armies, Volume I
Logistical Support of the Armies, Volume II
The Middle East Theater
The Persian Corridor and Aid to Russia
The China-Burma-India Theater
Stilwell's Mission to China
Stilwell's Command Problems
Time Runs Out in CBI
The Technical Services
The Chemical Warfare Service: Organizing for War
The Chemical Warfare Service: From Laboratory to Field
The Chemical Warfare Service: Chemicals in Combat
The Corps of Engineers: Troops and Equipment
The Corps of Engineers: The War Against Japan
The Corps of Engineers: The War Against Germany
The Corps of Engineers: Military Construction in the United States
The Medical Department: Hospitalization and Evacuation; Zone of Interior
The Medical Department: Medical Service in the Mediterranean and Minor Theaters
The Medical Department: Medical Service in the European Theater of Operations
The Ordnance Department: Planning Munitions for War
The Ordnance Department: Procurement and Supply
The Ordnance Department: On Beachhead and Battlefront
The Quartermaster Corps: Organization, Supply, and Services, Volume I
The Quartermaster Corps: Organization, Supply, and Services, Volume II
The Quartermaster Corps: Operations in the War Against Japan
The Quartermaster Corps: Operations in the War Against Germany
The Signal Corps: The Emergency
The Signal Corps: The Test
The Signal Corps: The Outcome
The Transportation Corps: Responsibilities, Organization, and Operations
The Transportation Corps: Movements, Training, and Supply
The Transportation Corps: Operations Overseas
Special Studies
Chronology: 1941–1945
Military Relations Between the United States and Canada: 1939–1945
Rearming the French
Three Battles: Arnaville, Altuzzo, and Schmidt
The Women's Army Corps
Civil Affairs: Soldiers Become Governors
Buying Aircraft: Materiel Procurement for the Army Air Forces
The Employment of Negro Troops
Manhattan: The U.S. Army and the Atomic Bomb
Pictorial Record
The War Against Germany and Italy: Mediterranean and Adjacent Areas
The War Against Germany: Europe and Adjacent Areas
The War Against Japan

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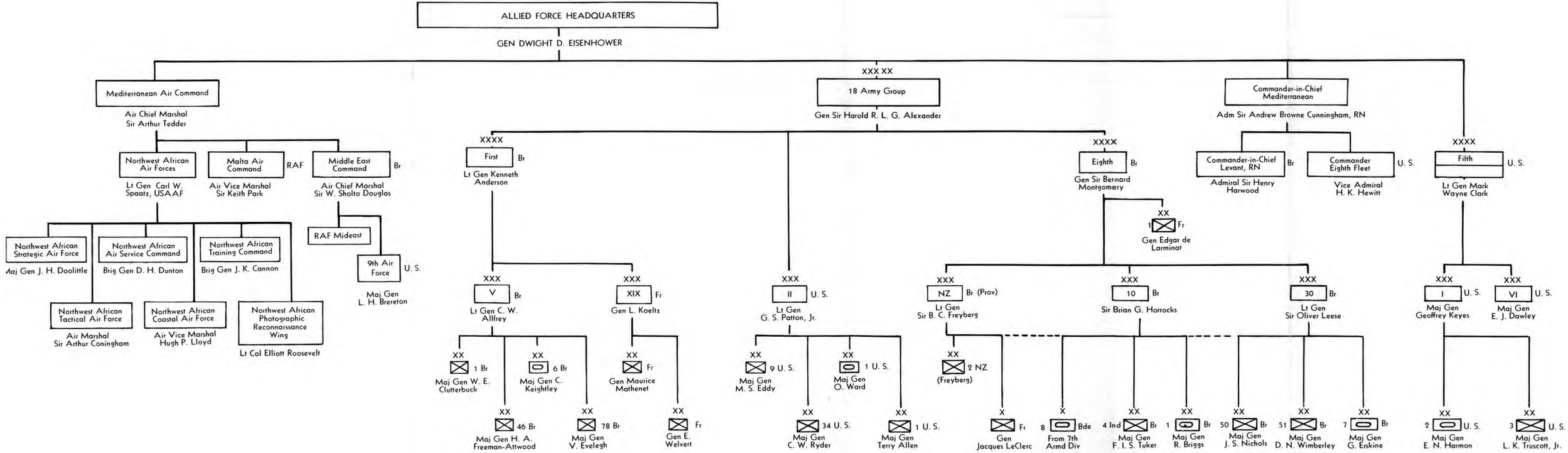
X Beach. *See* Mersa Bou Zedjar

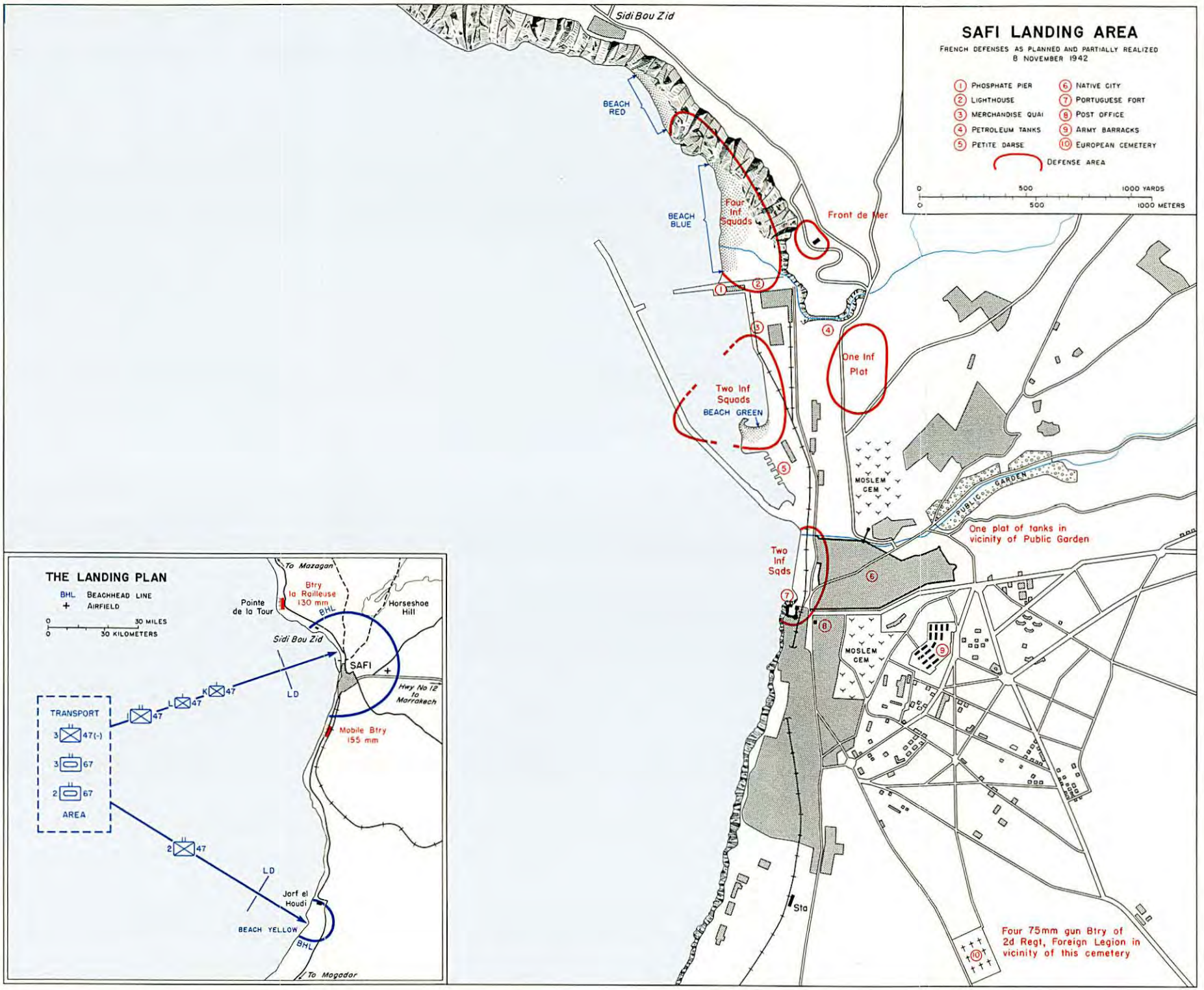
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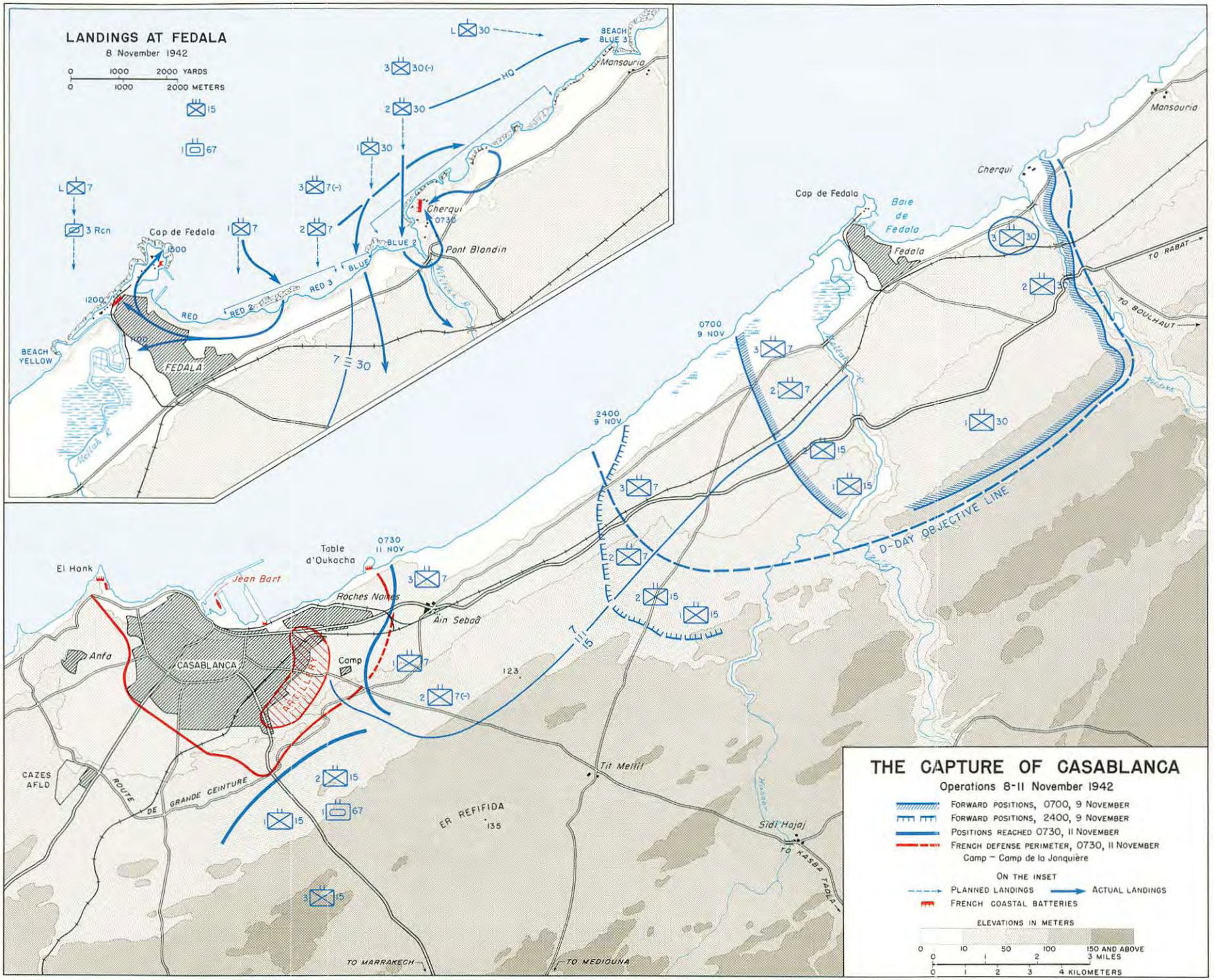
CHART 2—ALLIED COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN, MARCH 1943




SAFI LANDING AREA
FRENCH DEFENSES AS PLANNED AND PARTIALLY REALIZED
8 NOVEMBER 1942
1 PHOSPHATE PIER
2 LIGHTHOUSE
3 MERCHANDISE QUAI
4 PETROLEUM TANKS
5 PETITE DARSE
6 NATIVE CITY
7 PORTUGUESE FORT
8 POST OFFICE
9 ARMY BARRACKS
10 EUROPEAN CEMETERY
DEFENSE AREA
0 500 1000 YARDS
0 500 1000 METERS
Sidi Bou Zid
BEACH RED
BEACH BLUE
Four Inf Squads
Front de Mer
One Inf Plat
Two Inf Squads
BEACH GREEN
MOSLEM CEM
PUBLIC GARDEN
One plat of tanks in vicinity of Public Garden
Two Inf Sqds
MOSLEM CEM
Sta
Four 75mm gun Btry of 2d Regt, Foreign Legion in vicinity of this cemetery
THE LANDING PLAN
BHL BEACHHEAD LINE
+ AIRFIELD
0 30 MILES
0 30 KILOMETERS
To Mazagan
Btry la Railleuse 130 mm
Pointe de la Tour
BHL
Horseshoe Hill
Sidi Bou Zid
SAFI
Hwy No 12 to Marrakech
LD
TRANSPORT
3 47(-)
3 67
2 67
AREA
47
K 47
L 47
Mobile Btry 155 mm
2 47
LD
Jorf el Houdi
BEACH YELLOW
BHL
To Mogador

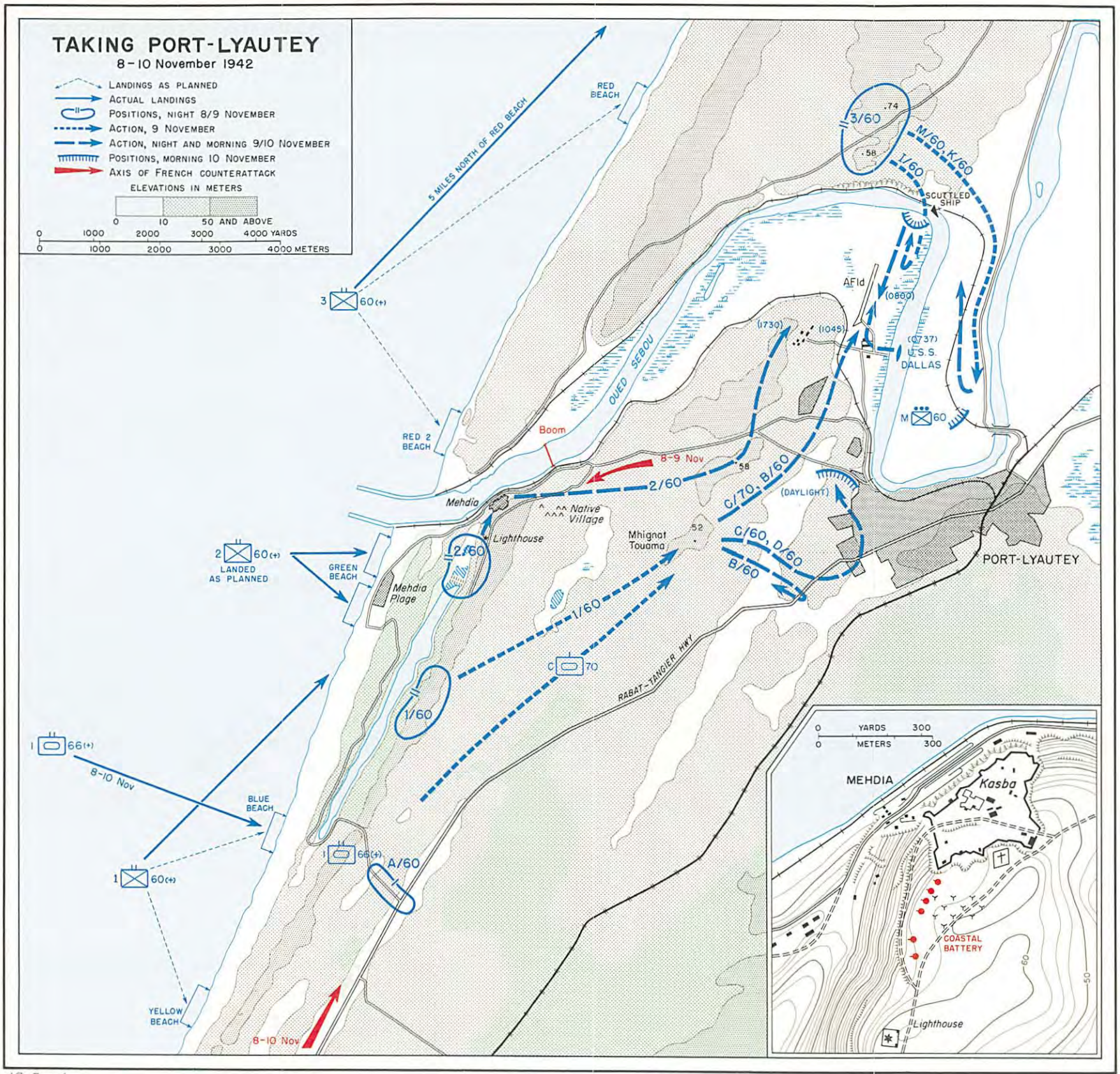
J.O. Renz.

MAP I



R. N. Hanson

MAP II



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MAP III

SEIZURE OF ORAN

8–10 November 1942

Axis of Allied Advance, date indicated
French counterattacks
Center of French Resistance

MAJOR FRENCH COAST DEFENSE BATTERIES

1. Fort du Santon
2. Ferme Combier
3. Ferme Ste. Marie
4. Pointe Canastel
5. Fort du Nord
6. Fort de la Pointe

ELEVATIONS IN METERS

0 100 200 400 AND ABOVE

0 5 10 MILES

0 5 10 KILOMETERS

26

Cap Falcon

BEACH Y

PLAINE DES ANDALOUSES

Ain el Turk

Bousseville

Mers el Kébir

Les Andalouses

El Ancor

Bou Sfer

ORAN

DJEBEL MURDJADJO

3 6(-)
ON HMS WALNEY AND HMS HARTLAND

Pointe Canastel

Pointe de l'Aiguille

Cap Carbon

1 Rn

18

16(-)

B 1(-)
(TF RED)

Arzew

BEACH Z

GOLFE D'ARZEW

Damesme

St. Leu

Port-aux-Poules

La Macta

Renan

St. Cloud

Dj KHAR

Arcole

Fleurus

Assi Bou Nif

St. Eugène

La Sénia

AFld

En Nekala

DIV BHD LINE

Elms B 1

BEACH X

Mersa Bou Zedjar

Cap Figalo

Misserghin

Valmy

Bou Tlélis

Brédéa

TF GREEN

TF RED

Reconnaissance

Lourmel

SEBKRA D'ORAN
(SALT LAKE)

Ste. Barbe-du-Tlélat

Oggaz

St. Lucien

St. Denis-du-Sig

Tafaraoui

Ef Rahel

Elms 2/509 Prcht

Source Blanche

TO AIN TEMOUCHENT AND TLEMCEN

TO SIDI BEL ABBÈS

TO PERREGAUX

TO MASCARA

J.R. Crawley

MAP IV

THE TUNISIAN BATTLEGROUND

MAIN ROAD
OTHER ROADS AND TRACKS
NORMAL GAUGE RAILROAD
NARROW GAUGE RAILROAD
SALT LAKE OFTEN DRY

ELEVATIONS IN METERS
0 200 500 1000 1500 AND ABOVE

0 40 MILES
0 50 KILOMETERS

Cap Serrat
Sidi Ahmed
Bizerte
Lac de Bizerte
Sedjenane R.
Mateur
Protville
Djebel Abiad
Djelma
Cap Bon
GOLFE DE TUNIS
Philippeville
Bône
La Calle
Tabarka
Sidi Nsir
Chouigui
Djedeida
El Aouina
Jemmapes
Duzerville
Le Tarf
Aoun es Souk
Bédja
Oued Zarga
TUNIS
La Goulette
Massicault
Medjez el Bab
Ksar Tyr
Souk el Khemis
Thibar
Testour
Goubellat
Guelma
Souk el Arba
Tebboursouk
El Aroussa
Zarhouan
Hammamet
Constantine
Rhardimaou
Gefour
Bou Arada
Pont-du-Fahs
Souk Ahras
Le Kef
Ouled Rahmoun
Djebibina
Enfidaville
Ain Mlila
Montesquieu
Siliana
Le Sers
Rebaa Oulad Yahia
Sbikha
Canrobert
Tadjerouine
Ebba Ksour
Ksour
Mactar
Dusseltia
Sousse
Ain Beida
Clairefontaine
Kesra
Morsott
Kalaa Djerda
Pichon
Kairouan
El Ala
Thala
Haidra
Sbiba
Fondouk el Aouareb
Youks-les-Bains
Tébessa
Hadjeb el Aioun
Sbeitla
El Ma el Abiod
Bou Chebka
Kasserine
Fériana
Thélepte
Fald
Sidi Bou Zid
La Fauconnerie
Bir el Hafey
Stax
Maknassy
Mezzouna
Maharès
Gafsa
Sened
Metlaoui
El Guettar
Bir Mrabott
Cekhira
GOLFE DE GABÈS
Tozeur
Chott el Fedjaj
El Hamma
Gabès
Chott Djerid
Kebili
Mareth
Tomezred
Matmata
Médenine
Ben Gardane
Foum Tataouine
TO TOUGGOURT
ALGERIA
TUNISIA
TUNISIA
LIBYA
S A H A R A

D. Holmes, sh.

MAP V

TEBOURBA ENGAGEMENT

1-3 December 1942

- Allied positions, date indicated
- Allied advance, date indicated
- Armored engagement, date indicated
- German positions, morning 1 Dec
- German positions, evening 3 Dec
- Axis of German attack, date indicated
- Olive grove

ELEVATIONS IN METERS

0 50 100 200 300 400 and above

1 0 1 MILES

1 0 1 KILOMETERS

"Coxen's Farm"
Elms 3 TUNIS BN
BROICH
XX
FISCHER
258
LUEDER
HUDEL
0800, 1 DEC
TO SIDI ATHMAN
Tine R.
CHOUIGUI PASS
0745/10EC
RECONNAISSANCE 3 DEC
Chouigui
BLADE (-)
ELMS WITHDREW TO TEBOURBA AND THE GAP, 1 DEC
BR 1ST PRCHT BN WITHDREW 1-2 DEC
TO SIDI N'SIR
St. Joseph's Farm
Eddekhila
Afid
1-2 DEC
Elms DJEDEÏDA
Djedeïda
2/H (-)
LUEDER
HUDEL
2 DEC
1-3 DEC
E/13 Armd
2/13 Armd
2 DEC
C. I/ES
2/13 Armd
1 DEC
A.I/ES
2/H
3 DEC
186
1-3 DEC
2-3 DEC
2/6 Armd Inf
1/13 Armd
1-3 DEC
E/13 Armd
2 DEC
17/21 L
TEBOURBA GAP
LANSERINE
DJEBEL
569
TEBOURBA
11 BR
DJEDEÏDA
KOCH
TO TUNIS
Medjerda R
3 DEC
El Bathan
1/E/5 (-)
1-2 DEC
INFILTRATION
3 DEC
1/5 Armd Inf
DJ EL GUESSA
104
145
2 DEC
Toungar
Elms KOCH
B 1 US
TO MEDJEZ EL BAB

I.R. Crowley

MAP VI

GERMAN ATTACK ON MEDJEZ EL BAB

6-10 December 1942

- Allied position, 6 Dec
- Allied position, 7-10 Dec
- Axis of Allied counterattack, date indicated
- Armored engagement, date indicated
- German position, morning, 6 Dec
- German position, evening, 6 Dec
- Axis of German attack, date indicated
- Olive grove

ELEVATIONS IN METERS

0 50 100 200 300 400 AND ABOVE

0 1 MILES

0 1 KILOMETERS

DJ LANSERINE 569

DJ EL ANG 668

DJ EL RHAR 243

DJ EL AHMERA 290 (LONGSTOP HILL)

DJ MAÏANA 186

DJ EL GUESSA 145

DJ BOU AOUKAZ 226

DJ EL ASOUD 214

DJ BOU MOUSS (GRENADIER HILL) 250

148

TEBOURBA GAP

TEBOURBA

TO CHOUIGUI PASS

TO TUNIS

El Bathan

Toungar

Bordj Toum

Heidous

Chassart Teffaha

Smidia

Grich el Oued

Halte d'el Heri

Massicault

Furna

Sidi Mediene (PETER'S CORNER)

Ksar Tyr

TO GOUBELLAT

Medjerda R.

MEDJEZ EL BAB

2/86 Pz Gr

NOON 10 DEC

1450, 6 DEC

HQ, 6 DEC

1525, 6 DEC

6 DEC

1300, 6 DEC

1345, 10 DEC

D/13(+)

E/13

1045, 10 DEC BEPZG(-)

EVENING, 10 DEC

1500, 6 DEC

Elms 1/13

ROUTE OF WITHDRAWAL, CCB NIGHT 10-11 DEC

(10 DEC)

86 Pz Gr

111

7 Pz

10 DEC AFTERNOON

1400, 10 DEC

1045, 10 DEC

Elms, 7 Pz Regt, 501 Pz Bn

6-10 DEC

10

ASH

NH

ES

CG

IG

MZI(+)

11 BR

Elms 3

3 Al

Elms 5

Elms 7

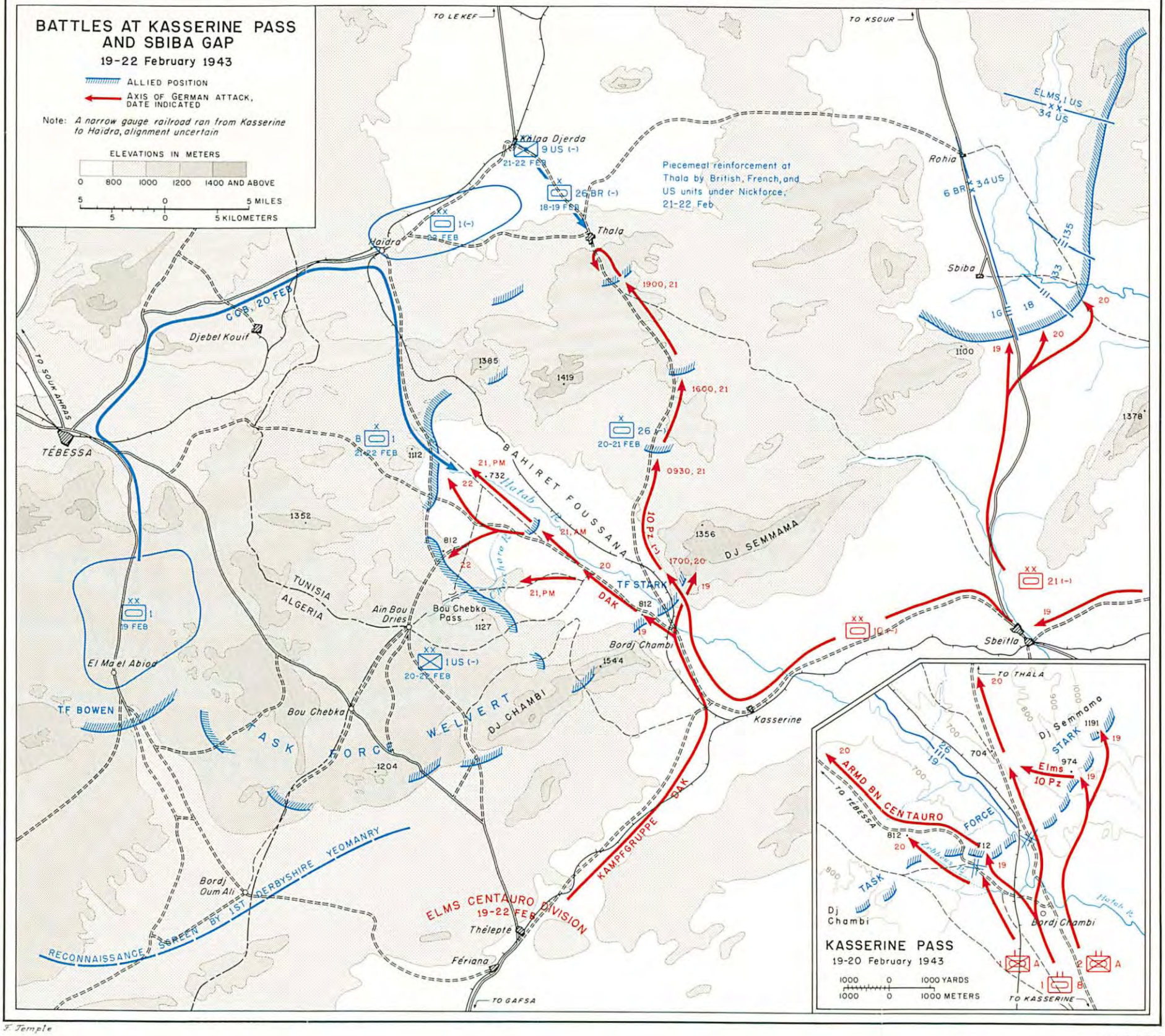
86

6(+)

TD 701

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MAP VII



F. Temple

MAP VIII

MARETH AND CHOTT POSITIONS

16 March–6 April 1943

- BRITISH EIGHTH ARMY FRONT LINE, 16 MARCH
- BRITISH EIGHTH ARMY FRONT LINE, 20 MARCH
- BRITISH ATTACK, DATE INDICATED
- AXIS OF BRITISH ADVANCE, DATE INDICATED
- GERMAN-ITALIAN FRONT LINE, 16 MARCH
- GERMAN-ITALIAN FRONT LINE, 26 MARCH
- GERMAN-ITALIAN FRONT LINE, 27 MARCH
- GERMAN-ITALIAN FRONT LINE, 1 APRIL
- GERMAN COUNTERATTACK, DATE INDICATED

ELEVATIONS IN METERS

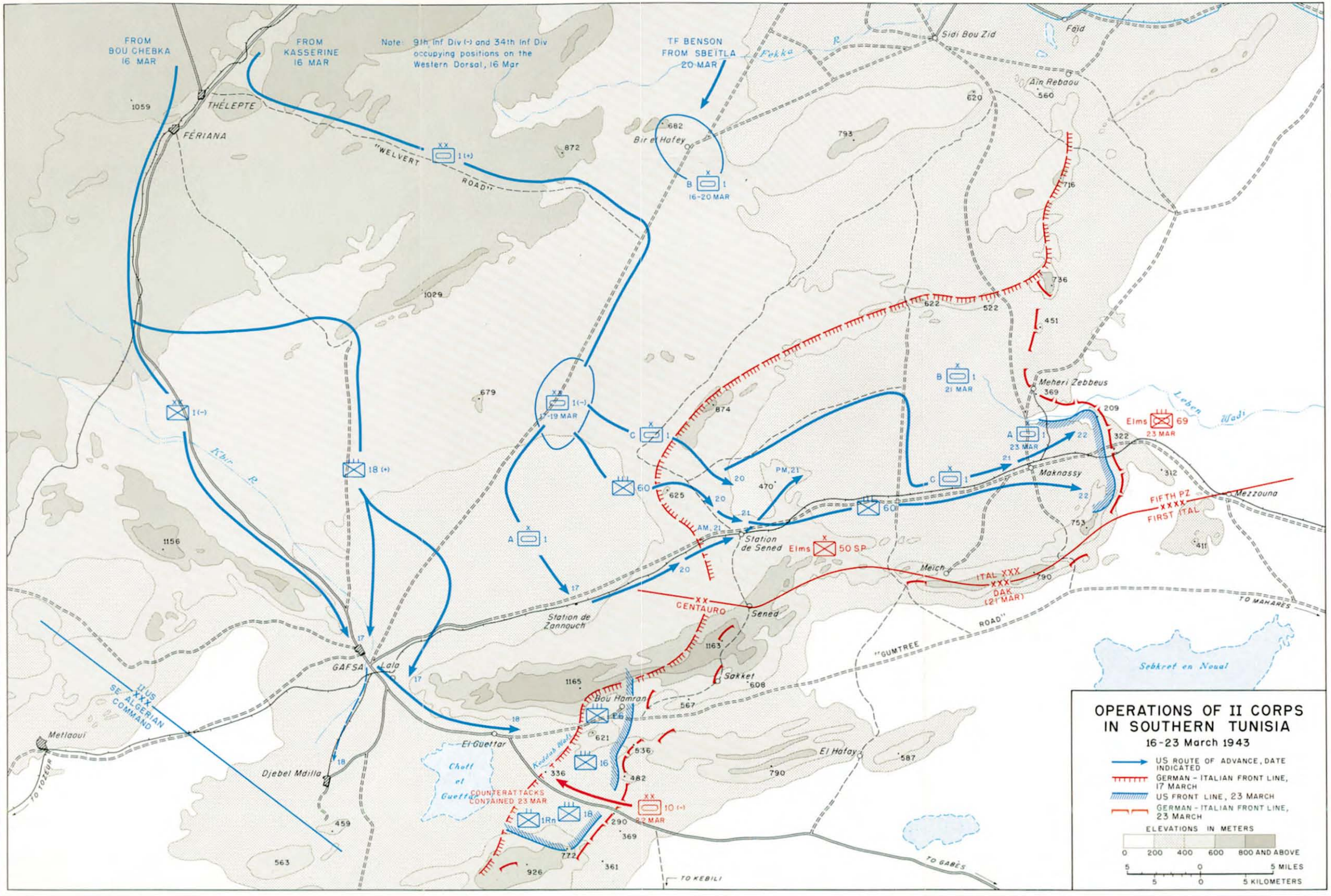
0 50 100 150 200 400 AND ABOVE

5 0 5 MILES

5 0 5 KILOMETERS

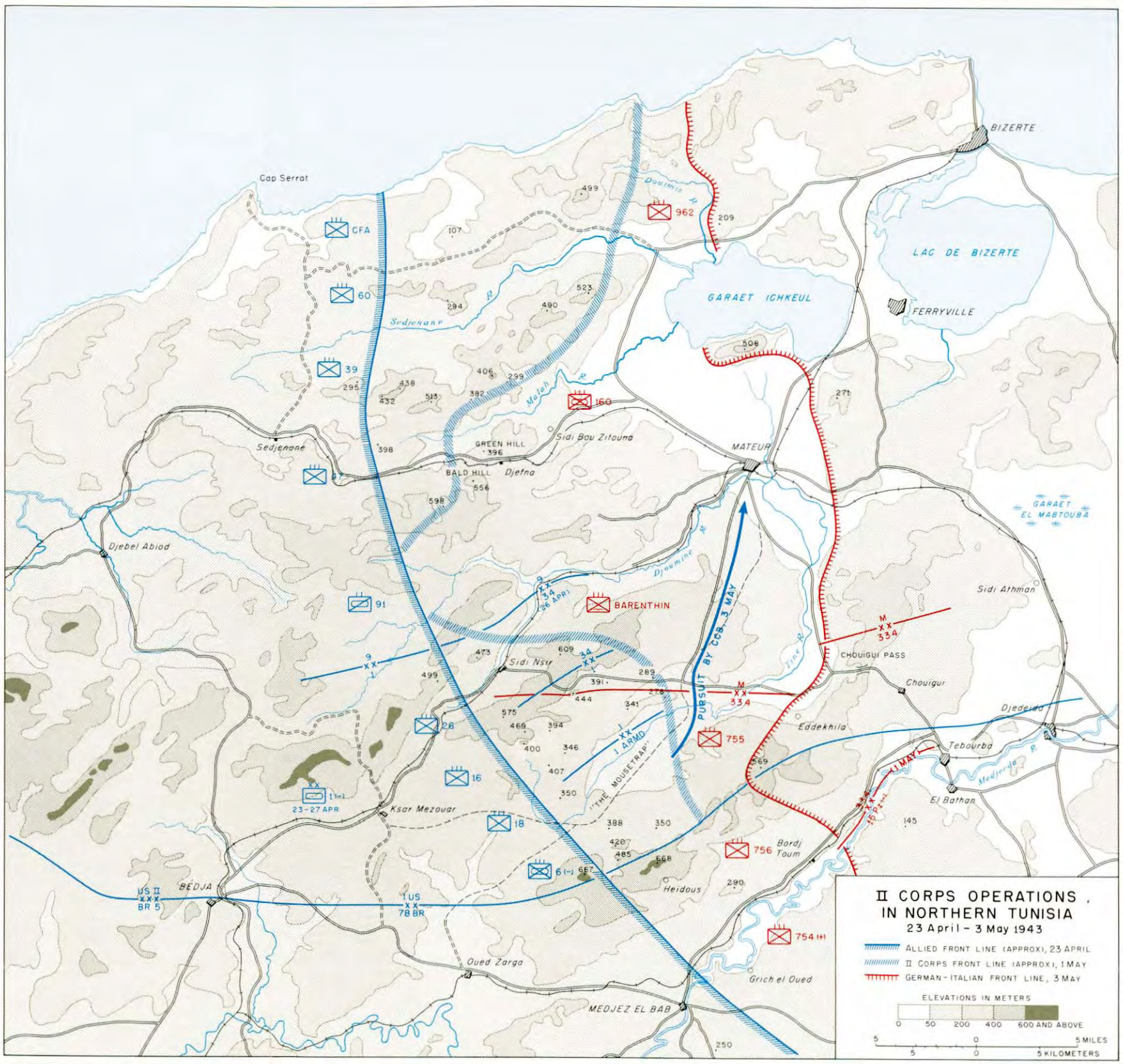
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MAP IX



J. Temple

MAP X



F. Temple

MAP XI

ELEMENTS REGIMENT BARENTHIN

TO MATEUR

TO BÉDJA

TO CHOUIGUI

Dj el Faouar 558

Dj el Hara 473

SIDI NSIR

Bou Dissa R

El Kradra

Dj Tahent 609

Kef el Gueda

Djebel Touta 444

Dj el Anz 289

Dj el Berokine 391

Kef el Gorda 575

Dj Sidi Meftah 341

Ez Habbas R

1 MAY

(30 APR)

DIVISON RESERVE

BATTLE FOR HILL 609
(DJEBEL TAHENT)

27 April - 1 May 1943

US FRONT LINE, NOON, 27 APRIL

US FRONT LINE, NIGHT, 28-29 APRIL

US FRONT LINE, EVENING, 30 APRIL

AXIS OF US ADVANCE, DATE INDICATED

GERMAN POSITION (APPROX)

Contour interval 25 meters

1000 500 0 1000 YARDS

1000 500 0 1000 METERS

D Holmes, Jr

MAP XII